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She rated tops in the Social Register but how did she rate as a woman?

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SOCIETY NURSE

by JEAN CAREW

"You're extra special,"
Doctor Fielding said softly.

"Tonight, for the first time, I've realized what I was missing."

The evening with the handsome young doctor had made Josette DeCourcy, Number One Debutante of the Year, realize that she was missing something, too. Was it just that now she felt she was of some use in the world? Or was it something warmer and more personal—like love?

Society Nurse

Jean Carew

MB

A MACFADDEN BOOK

THIS BOOK IS THE COMPLETE TEXT
OF THE HARDCOVER EDITION

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For Melodie

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A MACFADDEN BOOK . . . 1963

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Chapter 1

"WHY DON'T THEY hurry up? These slippers are killing me."

Josette DeCourcy—JoJo to her friends—glanced down at the doll-like figure beside her. They were waiting for the cue that would set the debutante column in motion. This was the Debutante Ball, one of the most important social events of the season in Clarkesville, Pennsylvania. Josette DeCourcy, as the number one debutante of the previous year, had the privilege of leading the group of debutantes up to the receiving platform.

The girl beside her was Sara Talbot, whose pet name was Flip. She was the sister of Josette's fiancé, and an extraordinarily pretty, vivacious girl. The nickname Flip was suited to her, Josette was thinking. It had taken all the persuasive powers of herself and Sara's mother, and even her brother, Edward Talbot, to keep Flip from appearing at the Debutante Ball with green hair. She liked to change the color of her hair, Flip had assured Josette, because then she could change her personality, too.

"Your personality will always be the same," Josette had told her firmly. "You're like a will-o'-the-wisp. You laugh one minute and cry the next; you're kind one day and mean the next. But you'll grow up," she added kindly. "Part of that growing up, I may tell you, is to listen to your mother when she asks you to lead the debutante parade with your hair its natural color."

"*You've* grown up, I suppose," Flip Talbot had coun-

tered. "I think it's being engaged to my darling brother Eddie that has made you so prim and proper all of a sudden."

"He doesn't like to be called Eddie," Josette protested. "You know he wants to be called Ed."

"For my money, he could be called Mr. Stick-in-the-mud," Sara said irreverently. "But as you say, this is Mother's show and I should be the dutiful daughter for one night anyway."

So here was Flip, standing beside her with light brown hair and wearing a bouffant white lace gown. There was a corsage of white orchids tied to her left wrist. Double doors to the ballroom stood open, and Josette could see the crowd of interested spectators, held back by white velvet ropes. At the opposite end of the room, on a raised dais, the social arbiters of Clarkesville were seated.

Mrs. Edward S. Talbot, Senior, as the uncrowned queen of the bluebloods, was seated first. Next was Charles H. Overton, Josette's guardian. As usual, his small rotund figure was unimposing; his benign face gave no hint of the financial genius that impressed even New York stock brokers. He was prouder of being one of the nation's foremost stamp collectors than he was of his financial reputation.

Josette was a little annoyed with her fiancé's sister for her blasé attitude about the Debutante Ball. Josette herself felt a lump in her throat that was just as big and just as hard to swallow as the one she had had at last year's ball. There was something about the dignity and tradition of being presented to the social leaders of Clarkesville that marked an important turning point in a young girl's life. No longer was she concerned only with school affairs, college proms or childish escapades.

After the Debutante Ball, Sara, like the others, would be expected to assume her responsibilities in the community. These included arranging for charity affairs; planning for the free camp the debutantes maintained for children of factory workers; and sponsoring art exhibits and other cultural projects.

It was quite true that JoJo DeCourcy had been somewhat disappointed in her work as a debutante. She had

a feeling that her whole group was acting in a robot-like fashion that completely missed the point of helping others; even this ball was a benefit for the Camp Fund. She had once suggested new activities; a home-making course which the debutantes would inaugurate; perhaps an English-speaking course for the foreign-born women in the factory section of town. Her suggestions had met with bland indifference.

During the past twelve months, JoJo had been increasingly dissatisfied with the debs' "charity" efforts. They never came in contact with those they were supposed to help. Just a gift of money—especially when it was raised by having a good time—seemed most *un*-charitable to Josette.

"Mother looks positively smug," Flip Talbot muttered under her breath. "And your guardian, poor dear, looks as if he didn't know what it was all about."

"Hush!" Josette admonished her *sotto voce*. "Remember, when I present you, curtsy to each of those on the dais. Then we will turn and go around behind the platform. Of course I'll leave my sheaf of roses at your mother's feet. Each of the other post-debs will lay her flowers along the front of the platform until it is banked solidly with red roses."

"Gee!" Flip exclaimed. "You make it sound so solemn, I'm beginning to get scared."

Josette glanced down at her with a mocking smile. "When you get scared, that will be the day!" The lilting strains of "Dance of the Flowers" began. "Come on; this is our cue. Remember, take it slow: One, two, three . . . one, two, three . . ."

She and Flip moved in graceful cadence, and five paces behind them the next couple followed. The spectators were quiet now as the column of beautiful young girls moved toward the dais. Each of the new debutantes was dressed like Sara Talbot, in a white lace picture gown that swept the floor. Each post-debutante was dressed like Josette DeCourcy in a slim sheath of cream-colored satin brocade, and carried a sheaf of scarlet roses. Josette knew her present costume was more becoming to her type than the floating bouffant-skirted gown she had worn last year.

Her straight black hair, parted in the center, almost

brushed her shoulders and turned up softly at the ends. Her wide gray eyes, framed in thick black lashes, looked serious even when she smiled.

The audience hushed as the lovely girls moved toward the dais in time to the music. Behind Josette and Flip came the next couple and, evenly spaced, another couple behind them, then another, and another. When they reached the platform, Flip swept her mother a low curtsy and Josette laid her sheaf of roses in front of the beaming woman. Mrs. Talbot was plump, but her flesh was firm and there were still traces of the blond beauty she had passed on to her daughter.

"Mrs. Talbot, may I present Sara Talbot?" Josette murmured. Flip rose from her curtsy, winked at her mother, and then moved on to Charles Overton. His eyes twinkled as he acknowledged the introduction to the girl he had known since she was an infant.

Josette and Flip went sedately down the line, each girl realizing that behind the introductions was an unspoken pledge to work on various community projects. Mrs. Talbot and Josette's guardian would ask her to serve on a committee for the DeCourcy Pavilion. Perry Delafield would see that they gave an event for the benefit of the First Ward Hospital. Miss Mary Weathersby would enlist their aid for care of the aged. Each of the post-debutantes had briefed her charge well in what would be expected of the new debs in the coming months.

When Flip's last introduction had been completed, JoJo led her around in back of the dais and started the slow, orderly return march toward the foyer. The center of the ballroom was all motion for a few moments as the girls passed each other in pairs—one column going toward the dais on the right, the other on the left, marching in the opposite direction.

Presently they were all back at the end of the room, standing in one long horizontal line. At a musical signal, the post-debs took two steps backward, so that there were two lines, with the new debs in front. Then, as one girl, each deb lifted her left arm with its orchid wrist corsage and touched a hidden spring among the flowers. A shower of multi-colored ribbons cascaded

from each corsage, fluttering as the girls moved their arms.

Again the orchestra struck a chord; the young men who were the debs' escorts pressed eagerly in from the foyer to claim their partners. The orchestra softened into a languorous waltz, and the men swept their partners to the center of the ballroom; the colored ribbons flew as the girls were whirled in the graceful turns of the formal dance.

By the time the center of the room was abloom with shifting colors, the post-debs had been joined by their own escorts—Josette first with Ed Talbot. They, in turn, formed an outer dancing circle, and the great room became the very embodiment of youth and gaiety.

The waltz slipped into a livelier, modern rhythm; the velvet ropes holding back the spectators were cut and immediately the entire room was one huge crowded dance floor—bright youth, of course, predominating. Josette DeCourcy, caught up in the swirling, perfumed mob, gave herself momentarily to the enjoyment of a way of life she could not change.

It was long after midnight before Josette had a chance to speak to Flip again. The two girls were in the powder room, and Flip was busily applying a whole new "face."

"It's rather late for you to be taking so much trouble, isn't it?" Josette laughed. "After all, no wrinkles are showing yet, darling."

Flip stuck out the tip of a pink tongue at JoJo's reflection in the mirror. "Dickie Higgins and I and some of the others are going night-club hopping," she explained. "Want to come along?"

"Of course not. Anyway, Ed wouldn't want to; you know that."

"Well, I guess if I were engaged to Edward Stanley Talbot I wouldn't want to be one of a bunch, either. Like you, I'd want to start improving that big, handsome young lawyer until he loosened up a bit. Even if I say so as I shouldn't, he's no hot firecracker, that dear brother of mine."

Josette refused to be drawn into a discussion of Ed's character. "Your mother will be worried when you disappear, won't she?"

"Oh, Mother's been getting used to the 'late' Flip ever since the school prom in June. That night we left the doleful dump early. Dickie and I and some of the crowd polished off the night at four different dives—all the way from here to Philadelphia. I didn't get home until seven in the a.m." She blew Josette a kiss and dashed off.

As Josette returned to the dance floor and Ed came to meet her, she recalled Flip's description of him: tall, blond and handsome. He was, at twenty-four, already a success in his profession. As a corporation lawyer in his late father's office, Ed had handled some of the firm's important cases. Josette smiled up at him as he took her in his arms and fell into step. Ed was over six feet, but Josette was a little above average height herself—five feet six.

"You're just the right height to be my partner," Ed whispered now, bending his head slightly so that his face was close to hers. "My, what big gray eyes you have, Grandma!"

"The better to see you with," retorted Josette.

"And do you like what you see, darling?" His voice was very low.

"You're too vain already. I reserve decision on that question."

"Just for that, I'll tell you that you have three more freckles on that pretty nose than you had the last time I kissed you," said Ed. "I counted them. Let me see now. There were four on that side, and now there are seven. . . ."

"You're just trying to make up an alibi for holding me so tight," protested JoJo. "Unhand me, sir. Miss Weathersby is reaching for those eyeglasses she wears on a snap chain."

Miss Weathersby was getting on in years and had been the town young people's severest critic for several generations past. Nobody really minded what she said, but potentially, as a wealthy spinster with a finger in every social pie, she could cause some embarrassment to the parents of reckless young people.

Ed did not loosen his hold but danced Josette out of range—as he said—"of the gorgon's eyes."

Snow had begun to fall when Ed and Josette started home. It was in that very car that Ed had first told her he loved her, Josette recalled, with a warm glow around her heart. The swirling white flakes were already beginning to cling to the trees. The country club was situated near Lake Mantou, about ten miles out of town, on the highway. But tonight Ed turned off on the dirt road bordering the lake.

This was the same road they had taken that other night, when the trees had been red and gold. Then it had been October, a beautiful autumn night with a bit of chill in the air. Ed and Josette had stood side by side watching the moonlit waves on the lake. JoJo had shivered slightly as an undercurrent of icy air swept across the water.

"You're cold," Ed had said abruptly. "Here." Suddenly he had drawn her close beneath one side of his topcoat.

"You're so slim, Josette," he had murmured, "one side of my coat is enough to cover you completely."

Josette had nestled close to him, so close that she could feel his heart beating.

"Fifty-fifty, share and share alike," murmured Josette, the warmth that had begun in her heart spreading all through her. This was where she belonged, she felt. It was such a safe feeling: to be in a young man's arms.

"Josette, I love you. I think you know how I feel about you."

"How *do* you feel?" JoJo had asked impishly.

"That we are ideally suited to each other," Ed had said promptly. "We have the same background, the same friends. I intend to enter the diplomatic corps. As my wife you will be internationally famous as a hostess."

"You make it sound as if I had passed an exam!" JoJo had exclaimed. Then penitently she had added, "No, I didn't mean that. But you could be more romantic."

"I told you I loved you. I'm asking you to marry me. Josette, say you love me, too. Say you'll marry me."

Josette, snug in his embrace, had whispered dutifully: "I do love you, Ed dear. I'll marry you."

But afterward a tiny doubt had crept in. Did she

really love him? Josette wondered at sudden odd moments. Of course I do, she had told herself sternly over and over.

Now, sitting beside him in the car, she twisted the star sapphire that was her engagement ring round and round her finger. Ever since he had given it to her, Josette thought, Ed had acted as if he owned her.

Now he broke in sharply on her thoughts: "Josette, I've been patient. But I can't wait forever. I want a definite answer—*when* will you marry me? We should be making wedding plans."

"Oh, Ed, give me a little more time! I want to be sure. . . ."

"Don't be coy, Josette; it's not becoming to you."

Ed, his hand firm on the wheel, took his eyes off the road for a split-second to glance sideways at her. He had one glimpse of her pleading face before it was suddenly a mask of terror. Then her shriek echoed in his ears as he felt a soft impact and saw, as his gaze shifted, a dark shape as it was tossed to the side of the road.

"The fool!" Ed gritted his teeth and eased the car to a stop just beyond the spot where the dark bundle had rolled into a ditch.

"He ran in front of me, Josette. You saw it. I couldn't help it! I think he did it on purpose!"

Chapter 2

JOSETTE WAS OUT of the car almost before it had stopped. There had not been enough snow to make the ground either wet or slippery, but her satin slippers were unsuited to the crusted ruts of the seldom used back road. She reached the crumpled form in the ditch and impulsively stretched out her hand toward the inert figure. It was a frail old man, and his sparse silvery hair was clotted with blood.

"Don't touch him," Edward Talbot shouted as he came running up.

"But he may be dead," Josette protested. "Oh, what are we going to do?"

"You stay here with him," Ed Talbot told her with authority. "I'll go for help."

Josette looked around at the bare tree branches and the giant firs that seemed to glower at her menacingly. She offered to go and get help herself while her fiancé remained beside the road.

"You have a gun in the car," she pointed out. "I'd be scared to death to stay here alone with the body."

"Now don't get hysterical," Ed said harshly. "I'll back the car up and we'll put this guy in the back seat. It's only two miles to the DeCourcy Pavilion."

"I'll drive," Josette offered quickly, glad to be doing something. She sped back to the car and maneuvered it so that her fiancé had only to stoop down and pick up the man who had been hit. He moved slightly and moaned as Edward laid him on the soft cushions of the car.

"Maybe I should take him to the First Ward Hospital," Josette said as she sent the car purring ahead. "I can get back on the highway a short distance from here, and it won't take more than a minute or two longer to reach it."

Ed Talbot protested. At the DeCourcy Pavilion, he pointed out, they would be protected from reporters at least for a time. It was bad enough for him to have been driving when the accident occurred, he added grimly. Once the papers got hold of that fact they'd really make the most of it. But at the DeCourcy Pavilion the staff could be trusted to say nothing for publication.

"Perhaps that is best," Josette agreed, "because I can make sure this poor old thing gets the right treatment and I can take care of the bills. Also," she went on, not expecting that Ed would accept her offer, "I'll say that I have been driving. Your insurance company won't hold it against you if I assume all responsibility."

Ed Talbot gave a sigh of relief. "That ought to take care of everything, even if the guy dies. I shouldn't wonder if he were mixed up with that bunch of hoods who insure derelicts like this and then see to it that the old guys meet with a fatal accident."

Josette did not answer. She was trying to think generously of her fiancé, but his attitude toward the old man and toward his own part in the accident seemed extraordinarily callous. Of course she could appreciate that the newspapers would make Ed appear to be a careless driver whose mind had been fixed on his companion or who had had a few too many cocktails at the Debutante Ball. Josette shuddered as she thought of the many pictures of Ed and herself that could be used to illustrate stories for days to come.

At the same time, if the old man were fatally hurt, they should be thinking of him and of what was best for him, not of themselves. Even if he were the victim of some gangster group, he should be given a chance to live. Josette felt utterly helpless. There was nothing in her background that qualified her to meet an emergency. She had been brought up in a world where she was wrapped in cotton wool and where others saved her from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

It occurred to her, as it had many times during her

debutante season, that just engaging in charitable projects was not the whole answer. She, like Ed Talbot, had never known what it was to want for anything. The attitude that had been carefully fostered in them since they were children was that money would buy anything. Gold, for the social élite of Clarkesville at any rate, was the great insulator, Josette thought bitterly.

There was only one person who would have shared her viewpoint. Aunt Liza Devery, who lived in Chicago and literally gave of herself as well as her money to the unfortunate, would have known what to do. For the first time in her life Josette wondered how her aunt had gotten her training for the work she did. She resolved to visit her in Chicago and get some facts the first chance she had.

For the moment, Josette concentrated on drawing up smoothly before the emergency entrance of the DeCourcy Pavilion. She ran around to open the door just as a white-coated attendant came outside. Josette saw with surprise that the old man was sitting up in the car, with Ed's steadying arm around him. In the harsh light from an overhead fixture, the accident victim looked more bedraggled than ever. He was unshaven and his soiled shirt was open at the throat and stained with blood from his head injury. He had on a heavy worn overcoat but was nevertheless shaking violently—probably from shock, Josette thought with sympathy. The attendant brushed past her, then recoiled when he saw the patient he was supposed to take in.

"I believe you want the First Ward Hospital . . ." he began in tones as frosty as the night.

"I'm not interested in what you believe," Ed Talbot said sharply. "This man has been hurt—run over, in fact. Miss DeCourcy was driving my car when he suddenly stepped out onto the road. We don't know how badly he is hurt."

"Oh, Miss DeCourcy!" the attendant said, suddenly recognizing Josette. "That's different. He looks as if he could walk. Let's bring him inside."

Josette started to protest against having the old man make the effort to walk into the receiving station of the hospital. But apparently Ed Talbot did not seem to think anything of it. He and the attendant half guided,

half carried the old man over the concrete floor and the waxed tile of the warm room beyond. Josette had been there often in her work with the Pavilion Committee. It seemed doubtful, however, that the exclusive private hospital had ever before opened its door to a dirty vagrant.

"We'll put the old guy on this table here," the attendant said briskly, "and I'll see what's the matter."

Ed Talbot straightened up as he finished helping the man up on the table and brushed his coat where it had come in contact with the derelict's greasy overcoat. Josette had never seen him look so annoyed. He sternly ordered the attendant to take his hands off the accident victim and to call Doctor Montgomery, chief of staff, at once. The attendant, enjoying his moment of power, announced that Doctor Montgomery was in Europe.

"Then get his assistant, Doctor Holton," Josette broke in. "But do something quick. The poor man seems to have fainted."

The man had a peculiar grayish color that made him look as if he were dying. The attendant was unconcerned about this unsuitable patient and explained, with what sounded like satisfaction, that Doctor Holton was out of town. Ed Talbot almost exploded but managed to control his temper as he asked sarcastically: "Do you, sir, comprise the whole staff of the DeCourcy Pavilion when the chief doctors are away?"

The attendant flushed. "No sir. Of course not. Doctor Gregory Fielding of the First Ward Hospital, who is pinch-hitting for Doctor Holton, is here tonight. I'll call him if you like."

"I like," Ed Talbot said, his face impassive. "Get on that phone and get Doctor Fielding here pronto. We don't want this man to die on our hands."

For the next hour, most of which she spent sitting alone in the reception room, Josette had ample time to worry about the situation. Doctor Fielding had appeared almost at once—as tall as Ed; his manner in direct contrast to Ed's outgoing personality. He had an air of deep reserve that, combined with his calm, unhurried way of speaking, somehow inspired instant

confidence. His dark eyes flickered briefly over Josette and her escort, and the next moment he was giving his entire attention to the injured man on the table.

At his direction the victim was wheeled away into another room, Ed and the now meek attendant following. For the first time since the accident Josette felt reassured. Doctor Fielding was surely the one to see that the old man had the right treatment immediately.

It must be wonderful, Josette mused, to be able to help others in time of desperate need. Of course a doctor's life must be a hard one, and it did require many years of training. But all the study and effort must be rewarding when, like Doctor Fielding, one was confronted by an emergency in which a person's life was at stake. Josette wished suddenly that she knew how to help, in even a small way, when someone was dependent on her for aid. Tonight, for instance, she would have liked to have been of some help to that old man.

When Ed and Doctor Fielding returned, Josette jumped to her feet in alarm. Her fiancé looked strained and haggard, and the doctor was frankly tired.

"Is he—is he—?" Josette questioned.

"The man will live," Ed said coldly. "But the doctor seems to think it's no thanks to us. His name, by the way, is Jim Norton. Now I think I'd better go phone your guardian and my mother. It's almost four o'clock, and they know I never keep you out after three."

Doctor Fielding quirked an eyebrow after Ed as he left the room. But he did not make any comment. Instead, he sank into a nearby chair and passed his hand wearily over his face.

"That's true," Josette said timidly. "Ed always brings me home before three o'clock; he promised my guardian he would. Some people think Ed is a little too conservative," she added defiantly, "but I like him that way."

Doctor Fielding shook his head as if to dismiss the subject of Ed Talbot. There were deep circles under his eyes, and Josette thought remorsefully that he had probably been busy since early morning.

"I'm sorry if we did the wrong thing with Mr. Norton," she began. "We didn't know what to do."

"You should have done nothing, except get hold of the state troopers. Above all, you shouldn't have picked him up and then driven over a rough dirt road for over a mile."

"How did you know that the road bordering on Lake Mantou is still unpaved?" Josette asked in astonishment.

"My family used to own property on the lake," Doctor Fielding said impatiently. "But that makes no difference; the important thing is: never move a person who has been in an accident. In the case of Jim Norton, he has a broken hip, and if he had been handled right it wouldn't have been too bad. As it is, with all the joggling, the bone slipped out of place and he'll require an operation before it can be properly set."

"I'm sorry. . . ." The words sounded woefully inadequate to Josette. She added, in her own defense, "I thought he had hurt his head. There was all that blood. . . ."

"He has a slight concussion," the doctor said, trying to repress a yawn. "But the head injury is not too serious. The trouble is with the hip. However, Miss DeCourcy," Doctor Fielding fixed her with a stern eye, "you are missing the point of what I was trying to say. Just promise me that if ever you run over somebody again, you'll get proper help before you move him."

"I didn't—" Josette started to say without thinking, and then closed her lips firmly. Actually, it did not matter who had been driving the car; the doctor's point was just as valid. Without meaning to, she said earnestly:

"I'll do better than that, Doctor Fielding. I promise you that I will find out what to do when people are hurt or sick. I have worked on committees both for this hospital and the one in the First Ward, but of course I never came in contact with any of the patients. Our main purpose was to raise money."

Doctor Gregory Fielding looked at her for a long moment without saying anything. He did not appear to be angry; rather, he looked as if he were almost sorry

for her. Josette felt herself coloring under that intense and impersonal regard.

"I have no doubt you are sincere," he said at last. "For the moment, that is. But I know you debutantes. Tomorrow this will all be like a bad dream. You'll simply pay Norton's bill or have your butler bring around a basket of fruit and that will be the end of it."

"How wrong can you be?" Josette demanded. "I'll prove to you that debutantes are not the empty-headed lot you think we are. There must be some way I can learn to help people, and that's what I am going to do."

For the first time Doctor Fielding smiled, and Josette realized with a start that he was a handsome and personable young man as well as an efficient doctor. But any feeling of attraction she had was only fleeting. The doctor was saying coldly:

"Yes, I can just see Miss Josette DeCourcy—the one the newspapers refer to as the number one debutante of the year and Clarkesville's most beautiful girl in the last ten years—as a practical nurse. Why, you probably don't even know how to make a bed."

"I can find out," Josette began hotly, then broke off as Ed came back into the room. He had had trouble reaching her guardian, Ed explained, because Mr. Overton had already retired. But it was all right, except that they had better get going right away.

His good humor entirely restored, Ed shook hands with Doctor Fielding and thanked him in a condescending manner that embarrassed Josette. She herself did not say a word beyond a brief goodbye and the promise that she would be around in the morning to see how the patient was getting on.

"That won't be necessary," Doctor Fielding said sharply. "I assure you Jim Norton will be properly cared for. We'll have to build him up a little before the operation; it is my guess that he hasn't had a decent meal in years."

"In the meantime," Ed put in, "I am going to call a special meeting of our committee on legal investigations to see if we can't stamp out this gangster racket that sacrifices poor old men in order to fatten the pocketbooks of vicious criminals."

"You do just that," Doctor Fielding said as he

showed them out the door, "and we of the medical profession will do our part. As for what you have said you will do, Miss DeCourcy, I won't hold you to it. I know you are busy with your own social affairs, and I think you would be making a mistake to be so concerned over a poverty-stricken old man."

His smile was mocking as he closed the door behind them. Josette got into the car silently, feeling utterly frustrated.

Chapter 3

THE NEXT morning it was after ten o'clock when the housekeeper, Matilda Veery, came in with Josette's breakfast tray. She was a plump, rosy-faced woman who had kept house for Charles Overton for many years. Josette had never bothered with the details of housekeeping and was not even sure how many domestics her uncle employed. There was Celia, of course, who kept the rooms clean under Matilda's eagle eye and who served the meals. There was also a cook, but Josette had little contact with her.

The house, like those surrounding it in that section of Clarkesville, had been built in the early part of the century. By modern standards, it was too big and too rambling. But Charles Overton, like the Talbots and the Perry Delafields, found his way of life too comfortable to change. That was the impression the house gave—one of comfort. Although Charles Overton was wealthy and Josette had a fortune of her own, the furnishings were not pretentious. It would have taken a connoisseur's appraising glance to recognize the intrinsic worth of the Oriental rugs, the delicate glassware, the fine old Haviland china and the valuable paintings that hung on the walls.

"The snow is over, thank goodness," Matilda said briskly as she shut the windows and opened the Venetian blinds. "The first snow never does last. But it's a gloomy day, Miss Josette, and that's a fact. I wouldn't have called you this early; only you asked me."

Josette accepted an extra pillow behind her head and

helped adjust the breakfast tray across her knees. She had wondered often since her engagement to Edward Talbot if there might be any chance of luring Matilda away from her guardian. She did not, she realized, know how to get her own breakfast!

That thought brought back the memory of last night's talk with the impatient Doctor Gregory Fielding. He had accused her of not knowing how to make a bed. She said now to Matilda, who was hanging up her evening gown and putting away her slippers:

"Matilda, when do you make the beds around here?"

Matilda was so startled she dropped a slipper. "Whenever you leave, miss. I try to have Celia straighten up the room not more than fifteen minutes after you go out."

"I'd like to watch her make the bed."

"Don't she make it right? Honestly, the girls you get these days don't know their hands from their feet. I thought she could at least make a bed right."

"Oh, I have no complaints," Josette said hastily. She was sorry she had brought up the subject. It was evident she had only stirred up trouble for Celia, and it was impossible to explain that she wanted instruction in bed making. "Just forget the whole thing," she told Matilda.

She felt equally frustrated when she talked with her guardian. After she was dressed, she went looking for him and found him in his study surrounded by his beloved stamp collection.

"My, we're looking beaming this morning," Charles Overton said, looking at his ward fondly. "No one would ever know that you had danced half the night and then spent the rest of the time trying to save a poor old derelict."

"I didn't hit him, Uncle Chuck," Josette said before she thought.

"I know you didn't," her guardian said placidly. "Edward called me this morning and made a clean breast of the whole thing. I must say I don't approve of what he did, but since you went along with the gag, as they say—Are you really in love with Edward Talbot?" he interrupted himself.

"I've said I would marry him, Uncle Chuck."

"I guess there's no more to be said, then. Edward told a long story about gangsters insuring old men and how they were trying to frame him because he's working on some sort of committee. I couldn't make head or tail of it, but I guess you know all about it anyway. Run along now. I have three new stamps that are really a find. I'm going to write them up in the philatelists' journal."

Josette kissed him lightly on his bald spot and glanced at her wrist watch. She had just time to stop and get a basket of fruit for Jim Norton and leave it at the hospital before she attended a charity lunch. It would have been worse than useless to mention practical nursing to Uncle Chuck. She doubted if he had ever heard the term.

As she went into the reception room of the DeCourcy Pavilion, Josette was struck again by the atmosphere. It could have been a country club. There were chintz-covered chairs grouped around glass-topped tables, and there were flowers everywhere. The reception desk was placed unobtrusively at one side, and the pretty nurse-receptionist looked up brightly as Josette placed the basket of fruit on her desk.

"I'm calling on a patient," Josette explained. "But first I want to ask you something. How does one get to be a practical nurse?"

"We don't have any practical nurses here," the girl behind the desk explained. "All of our patients require the services of trained nurses, and usually the patient has nurses around the clock. The others on the staff are the cleaning women, cooks and so on. But only a registered nurse comes in contact with our patients."

"Oh." Josette felt reprimanded, as if she should have known that the DeCourcy Pavilion did not take patients of the common or garden variety. Those who required medical aid were wealthy and of the social élite. The hospital was not concerned with the ordinary victims of sickness or accident. Josette thought privately that it would be a brave germ that would dare to bite Mrs. Talbot without the august lady's express permission.

Smiling a little at her own fancies, Josette decided she had better leave the fruit and get on to the hotel

where the charity luncheon was being held. "I'd like to leave this basket of fruit for Mr. James Norton, who was admitted last night. . . ."

Josette broke off as the nurse frowned.

"We're having a lot of trouble with him, Miss DeCourcy. Frankly, I don't think he's the type for the DeCourcy Pavilion. Two nurses have already complained about him. Mr. Norton does not want a private room; he says he feels as if he were in solitary confinement in a prison. He makes a great fuss every time the nurse tries to wash him; he doesn't even want his bed changed. The last nurse asked me to have Doctor Fielding stop in and see her while he is here."

Josette abandoned all thought of being on time for the luncheon. She picked up the basket of fruit and said that she would deliver it personally to the recalcitrant patient. The nurse at the reception desk protested, but Josette knew that she could not actually refuse to let her see the man.

When she opened the door Jim Norton was sitting propped up in bed, watching a television show with an unamused expression. His eye lighted up as Josette came into the room.

"Gawd bless you, miss, for taking pity on a poor old man. Turn that blasted thing off, Nurse, and get outa the room. I got a visitor."

The nurse seemed only too glad to escape, and Josette put the fruit on the bedside table.

"You wouldn't believe it, miss, but them nurses almost washed the skin off me already. And then they sent some young guy in here to shave me and even give me a haircut. I didn't need no haircut. It's comin' on to winter, ain't it?"

"You look very well," Josette said diplomatically. Actually, clean-shaven and with his sparse gray hair neatly combed, he did not look much like the bundle of rags that Ed Talbot had lifted into his car. There was a small bandage on one temple, but it merely gave him a faintly distinguished air.

"Before anyone comes, miss, open the drawer in that there table and take out what the girl called my 'effects.' It's all right," he added, as Josette hesitated. "She said I was to keep them."

Josette was not at all certain that she should open the brown manila envelope, but it seemed wise to humor Jim Norton. The pitiful few objects she spilled on the counterpane were harmless enough. There was a long and very dirty white envelope, a broken piece of a comb, thirty-six cents in change and a white bone button. Norton pounced on the white envelope and drew out the legal-looking document it contained.

"Here, miss; I want you should keep this for me. It's my life insurance policy, see? If I should croak I'll get a real nice funeral with all the trimmin's. I ain't gonna be put in no potter's field like an old bum. I'll have a real bang-up funeral."

Josette was touched and hastened to assure Norton that he was in no danger of dying. But he was now as anxious to have her return the other items to the manila envelope and put it back in the drawer as he had been to have her take it out. To humor him, Josette slipped the white envelope into her purse with the thought that she could discuss it later with Edward. Then she dutifully picked up the comb, the button and the change and restored them to their hiding place.

"Good afternoon, Jim." It was Doctor Fielding's crisp voice that made her turn toward the door. Although Josette knew that he must have had little sleep, the doctor seemed as fresh and competent as if he had slept the clock around. He gave her only the briefest of nods and then picked up the chart from its place on the patient's bed. While the doctor studied it, Jim Norton kept up a running fire of derogatory comment on the DeCourcy Pavilion, on nurses who were insane on the subject of soap and water and on the misfortune that had given him a private, lonesome room instead of a bed in one of the friendly, crowded wards of Doctor Fielding's hospital.

"We may be able to transfer you to the First Ward Hospital," the doctor said placatingly. "In fact, I'd rather have you there when Doctor Holton comes back. I won't be needed here every day."

"Gawd bless you," Jim Norton said with a toothless grin. "Maybe I don't have to stay in the hospital at all, huh?"

"Not so fast, my fine fellow," Doctor Fielding said,

as warmly if had known the patient all his life. "You and I haven't really gotten acquainted yet."

"I wish I could wait around to see the beginning of this beautiful friendship."

Josette was beginning to feel nettled by the young doctor's studied way of ignoring her existence. "Unfortunately, Doctor, I must tear myself away, but I did have one question I wanted to ask you. I meant what I said last night. But nobody will tell me how I get to be a practical nurse."

The young doctor's eyes fastened on her, and Josette knew he did not miss a single detail of her Paris-designed suit, silver mink stole and saucy feathered hat. As she had the night before, she felt herself coloring under his impersonal stare.

"That's a very simple question to answer." Doctor Fielding replaced the chart on the bed with meticulous care. "There are fine schools that teach practical nursing in most of the big cities, including Philadelphia, New York and Chicago. But don't you think you are carrying this a little too far? I know and you know that Miss Josette DeCourcy will never lower herself to study anything useful."

"You'll see," muttered Josette grimly. "Goodbye, Jim. Take care of yourself and don't worry about the bills. I'll take care of everything."

"Yes, hurry right along," the doctor said amiably. "You must be late for some society shindig or other. And as I said, don't try to get away from that butterfly life of yours. You were born and brought up never to raise your hand, and I'm sure you never will."

Josette was still smarting as she drove up to the Clarkesville Hotel and rushed through the lobby.

"You're a hateful know-it-all," she told Doctor Fielding in an imaginary conversation. "You don't realize that even a debutante can want to be useful and help humanity. You're not the only one who can help the sick. I'll prove it to you if it's the last thing I do."

Sometime during the short drive the thought had come to Josette that the ideal person to help would be Aunt Liza Devery. Because of her work with the settlement house, she probably knew all about the school

of practical nursing in Chicago, and she would help her favorite niece to get enrolled in the school and take whatever courses were required. Josette felt calmer as soon as she had resolved to phone Aunt Liza that very night. Her peppery little relative would have the right answer for everything.

As she had expected, when she reached the hotel the dining room doors were closed and a hum of modulated feminine voices came faintly into the hall. The bellboy admitted her at once, however, and Josette made her way to the head table and to the empty chair at Mrs. Talbot's left. The luncheon was an annual affair of the debutante group. Today they would plan on the number of Thanksgiving baskets to be distributed among the needy and assign each of the new debutantes to canvass the local tradesmen for donations.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Talbot," Josette whispered as she slipped into her place at the table. "The delay was unavoidable, I assure you."

"That's all right, my dear," the matron said with resignation. "Sara, my own child, hasn't shown up yet." She indicated the empty chair on her right and then glanced up as the door opened again and Flip Talbot stood posed like an actress in the entrance.

"Hello, darlings," she said with an affected drawl. "I'm not too late, I hope. I really couldn't tear myself away from the hairdresser."

Some of the debs snickered, but no one, not even Flip's mother, seemed unduly put out. Still acting as if she were on the stage, the latecomer shrugged off her fleecy violet wool cape and let it fall unheeded to the floor. She was wearing a dinner dress of lavender chiffon, and she said in a deprecating voice:

"Sorry to overdress, my dears, but I won't have a chance to go home and change after we finish this meeting."

Sara Talbot still had not moved from her spot just inside the door, and now she began to unwind the lavender scarf that covered her hair and was folded under her chin. There was complete silence in the room as everybody watched her languorous gestures. Then, with a sudden movement, Flip snatched the scarf from her head and faced them all defiantly. Her hair, elab-

orately coiffed and curled, was a deep purple! There was a gasp of astonishment from the debs and Mrs. Talbot, and then room broke into grudging applause.

Josette felt faintly sick. She could understand now why Doctor Fielding felt that she was insincere about wanting to help others and totally unprepared to do anything useful for humanity. He classed all debutantes with Flip. And the girl had really gone too far this time. She was turning a charity luncheon into a comic striptease that, to Josette was not funny.

"Sara!" Mrs. Talbot stood up and tried to sound reproving. But it was evident to all that she thought her daughter's actions rather cute. "I must ask you to go home at once and have the maid wash that dreadful stuff from your hair. Josette will take your place at this meeting and will tell you later on what we have decided."

"You don't like my hair, Mumsie?" Flip said in mock dismay. "I thought it was a *divine* color. But of course if you don't approve I will change it at once."

Once more Flip raised her hand to her head, and this time she removed, not a scarf, but her purple hair. She stood holding the wig in her hand and grinning as the whole room shrieked with laughter. Flip bowed gracefully and made her way toward the head table.

Josette sat staring down at her plate, ashamed for all of them. When there was so much suffering and misery in the world, it was not only stupid but downright wicked to waste time and effort on silly, childish pranks.

Chapter 4

JoJo's AUNT, Liza Devery, proved to be an inspiration. When JoJo reached her in Chicago, her very enthusiastic response made it easy for the girl to picture the white-haired, bright-eyed little woman smiling and gesturing at the phone as if her niece were right in the room.

"My dear Josette, you want to take up practical nursing? How wonderful! It makes me believe in mental telepathy, at least between the two of us. And to think that I'll actually have you here for a good long visit. . . ."

JoJo, bewildered by her aunt's conversational hopscotch, interrupted her long enough to say:

"You mean there's a place where I can learn practical nursing out there in Chicago?"

"But my dear, I thought you knew! I'm getting up a series of practical nursing classes in connection with the settlement house. Those funny old-fashioned ideas about night air being lethal or using dirty socks if you have a sore throat—we'll combat that sort of thing." JoJo gave up trying to follow her aunt, who rushed on:

"The first class starts right after Thanksgiving. You will live with me, of course; for some reason, I'm having a hard time getting twenty-five women to register. . . . What does Chuck say about this?"

JoJo explained carefully that her guardian had not been consulted yet, but he would doubtless agree to a visit with Aunt Liza. In fact, Josette went on, she had not told her fiancé, either.

"Just as well," Liza Devery said sharply. "I don't

believe Charles Overton ever did approve of my work with the settlement house, and that fiancé of yours would argue all day and every day against you learning anything useful. How soon can you come?"

Then and there Josette ran into one of the first stumbling blocks in her excursion into another world. Her social calendar was almost full right through the New Year, but she resolved that she would do a wholesale job of cancellation, with the excuse that her aunt really needed her at once. Finally she and Liza Devery agreed that she would come to Chicago right after Thanksgiving and would stay for the three months the full course required.

"You let me handle Charles Overton," Liza said firmly before she hung up. "I'll think of a good reason to have you come out here. Chuck always said I worked too hard on other people's problems and that I was getting too old for that sort of thing." JoJo thought her aunt's laugh had never sounded more youthful. "I'll just tell Chuck he was right," Liza chortled, "and he'll send you out here flying."

When the air-mail special delivery letter from Liza Devery arrived, Charles Overton was quite disturbed. The housekeeper brought the letter to him just as they were sitting down to dinner, and Josette was unprepared for his reaction.

"Lord love us! Your Aunt Liza says she had to slow down—getting short of breath. I told her she ought to take it easy. That settlement house takes too much out of an older woman . . ."

Charles Overton lapsed into silence as he read the many pages of Liza's large scrawl and then said suddenly:

"I ought to go out there and help her wind up her affairs in Chicago. She could come and live with us; no reason for her to keep up that big apartment on the Lake. I've always liked Liza. And maybe by now she's got that darned fool idea about personal charity out of her system."

"Does she want *you* to come?" JoJo asked in sick dismay. It seemed incredible that Aunt Liza would have said one thing over the phone and then betrayed her. But her uncle's next words were reassuring.

"No. As a matter of fact, she wants you to come out there for a few months. She's organizing something or other and says you could help. But I think she ought to wash her hands of the whole thing. Anyway, you've got all those parties scheduled; I understand the Delafields are giving a party for you and Edward."

"That's Christmas week," JoJo said hastily. "I'm sure I could get back for that. Anyway, I think we should do what Aunt Liza suggests. She might be seriously annoyed if we started to plan her whole life when she only invited me out for a visit."

"I guess you're right." Charles Overton sighed and gave her the letter. "If you feel you should go, of course I understand. You won't mind if I keep the envelope, dear? This is quite an interesting stamp. Maybe not valuable, but I'd like to study it awhile."

JoJo took no chances but telegraphed her aunt that very night. Then she sat down with her date book and methodically listed all those she must call to cancel her social obligations after the Thanksgiving weekend.

As she checked over the engagements, JoJo was struck again by the emptiness of her life. The theater party for the benefit of the camp fund; the morning musicales which were so sparsely attended, although everyone contributed; the bridge party which was really a gossip session in the name of charity—none of them required any special effort on her part. She made out a list of checks for her guardian to sign and ruefully concluded that she never would be missed!

She wasn't being quite fair to Ed Talbot, Josette admitted to herself. Even though she planned to be back for the Christmas week parties, Ed would surely miss her and their twice-a-week dates. But even here the way was made unexpectedly easy for her. Ed, running his hands through his blond hair, said slowly:

"I should spend some time in Washington; a friend of mine down there says I should be on the spot if I'm interested in a diplomatic career. Things are really popping at the moment. How long does your aunt want you to stay with her?"

"Aunt Liza said something about three months," JoJo said cautiously. "But of course I'd try to come back Christmas week; maybe I can bring Aunt Liza

with me. She's my only close relative and I'd like her to be at the Delafields' party."

"I have a feeling your Aunt Liza doesn't approve of me," Ed Talbot said, tweaking her ear. "But then, I don't approve of her charitable work either; she doesn't have the broad international view. Now, now, we won't argue about it," he added as Josette's eyes flashed. "We have much more important things to discuss, such as when we will get married."

"Married?"

"Yes, we're engaged. Remember?" Ed said, giving her a little shake. "We ought to be arranging for the church and our wedding trip—things like that."

"There's plenty of time," JoJo said hastily. "When I come back from Chicago . . ."

"I'd like to know by Christmas," Ed said firmly. "After all, it is important that I plan my career well in advance. Otherwise I'd look like a mighty poor executive."

"I wouldn't want our romance to interfere with your career," JoJo began hotly, and instantly repented her words. "I'm sorry, Ed; I didn't mean that. I'll set the date next month—that's a promise."

Josette found time to visit the First Ward Hospital only once in the next crowded weeks. Jim Norton had been operated on and a silver pin placed in his hip. Doctor Gregory Fielding was a wonderful surgeon, Jim informed JoJo, and had arranged for him to go to a nursing home after he started on the road to recovery. Possibly he would be able to move around some by Christmas; at any rate he would be out of the hospital.

JoJo was touched by the old man's obvious attempt to show her that he had a place to go for the holidays. The social service worker at the hospital had told her that Jim Norton's room was a miserable, lonely spot, and JoJo agreed to pay the cost of having him transferred to a place where he would get good care until he was fully recovered. Jim Norton never questioned the arrangements that had been made. His mind, when Josette saw him, was on a different subject.

"I'm sorry to hear you're going away, Miss DeCourcy," the old man said when she explained that she

would not see him again until the holidays. "But I guess a smart and pretty girl like you has a good many things she has to do. Just you hang onto that paper I gave you. The Doc says I'm good for years yet, but still it's a comfort to know I can be buried decent."

JoJo felt guilty; she had not thought of the insurance policy since Jim Norton had asked her to take it. "It's safe," she promised him, remembering it was still in the purse she had carried that day. "I thought perhaps I'd turn it over to a lawyer friend of mine."

"No, no, miss, you mustn't do that!" Jim Norton's face was white and his hands began to tremble. "I promised I wouldn't tell nobody about it, see? You're different; I trust you. But they'd be awful mad if they found out I was showing that paper around."

A little startled by his violent reaction, JoJo wanted to inquire who "they" were. But she had little time, and she did want to see Doctor Fielding before she left the hospital. She gave Jim her promise absently and, after waiting almost half an hour, saw the doctor coming toward her in the reception room.

As usual, Doctor Gregory Fielding seemed to generate his own electric current as he walked across the room. His movements were not hurried, but he gave the impression that he really should be somewhere else. He also acted as if he thought speaking with her, however briefly, was a waste of time, Josette decided with some annoyance. It was not the way most men reacted; they were usually pleased to have her attention.

"I won't detain you, Doctor Fielding," she said coolly. "I just wanted to thank you for what you did for poor Jim Norton; I understand he will be able to move around in a few weeks."

Gregory Fielding regarded her gravely and nodded. "You realize I didn't help Jim Norton for your sake, but for his own," he said bluntly.

JoJo could scarcely control her annoyance. Really, the man's air of superiority was infuriating!

A pert and brisk young nurse passed them and gave Josette an appraising glance. "You are wanted in sur-

gery, Doctor Fielding," she informed him, and moved noiselessly out into the corridor.

"It isn't terribly important," Josette said hastily. "I just wanted you to know I am going out to Chicago. If there is any question of money for Jim Norton's care, please get in touch with Charles Overton, my guardian, or with my lawyer's office—Talbot and Son—on Main Street."

Doctor Fielding smiled, his eyes crinkling as if at a private joke. "I'll do that, Lady Bountiful," he said in a mocking tone. "Meanwhile, *bon voyage!* I didn't think you'd last long in the role of visiting angel."

"It may interest you to know that, angelic or not, my trip to Chicago is entirely in the interests of becoming a practical nurse. My aunt founded a settlement house out there and she is starting a course in practical nursing in connection with it."

For once, Josette had the satisfaction of seeing that he was impressed. "Your aunt is Miss Liza Devery?" When she nodded, he went on: "She is doing wonderful work. But I still think you have the wrong idea about practical nursing. You think you just smooth a fevered patient's brow or arrange some flowers in the sickroom."

"I'm not a child!" Josette was so angry she could barely keep from stamping her foot for emphasis. "I know it's hard work. I know I have a lot to learn. But you didn't become a doctor and a surgeon without studying, either. *You* had to spend *years* learning."

Gregory Fielding reached out and put both his hands on her shoulders. "I'm still learning, Miss Josette DeCourcy. All doctors go on learning for the rest of their lives."

"If you really believe me, you may call me JoJo." She smiled.

"I do believe you, and I think it's pretty wonderful that a girl who is beautiful and wealthy is willing to give of herself to those who are hurt and in need."

JoJo said earnestly: "It's just that giving money to others through worthy charities is good, but not good enough for some of us. There ought to be personal sacrifice—personal service—for those who are in want or

in trouble. I thought you above all people would understand that."

Gregory Fielding grinned. "Referring, I suppose, to the fact that the Fieldings were among the founding fathers of Clarkesville, Pennsylvania." He shook his head ruefully. "I'd like to let you go on thinking that I gave up being a playboy and riding around in my own plane for the purpose of helping humanity. But I guess I'd better tell you the truth. There wasn't much money left when the youngest Fielding went to college, and there was no doubt I had to earn my own way. It just happened that I liked medicine; it's the most fascinating profession in the world."

"Uncle Chuck says you always like something you are good at and want to do," Josette agreed. Looking at his bright, animated expression as he spoke of medicine, she could see why those he had helped, like Jim Norton, rated him just a little lower than the angels.

An impersonal voice which still managed to sound slightly annoyed came over the loudspeaker.

"Dr. Fielding, wanted in surgery. Dr. Fielding, wanted in surgery."

"I'll bet all the nurses are in love with you," JoJo said impulsively, and saw a slow red flush stain his cheeks. He dropped his hands from her shoulders abruptly.

"When you get through with your training, you'll understand better how most nurses feel about the doctors they work with," Gregory Fielding assured her. "Goodbye, JoJo. Good luck and God bless you."

"Thank you, Doctor," she said crisply. "I'll come to see you first thing when I get back from Chicago. That will be about three months from now—say, around the first of March. Is it a date?"

Josette smiled at him impudently, but there was no answering smile from the doctor. Instead, his lips had set in their usual disapproving line, and his glance, instead of being warm and friendly, was definitely hostile. He seemed about to speak and then, without warning, wheeled and walked into the corridor without even a backward glance.

What in the world had she said now? Josette wondered.

Chapter 5

MISS LIZA DEVERY was used to planning not only her own life but the lives of those around her. As her niece, Josette DeCourcy knew that she would have every waking minute supervised by the peppery little humanitarian. As she led the way across the airfield toward the waiting limousine which was the one luxury her aunt permitted herself, she kept up a steady stream of conversation that required only an occasional murmur of assent from JoJo.

"We'll go out to the apartment and have a bite of lunch, and then I'll tell you all about what I'm doing and what you are going to do. Lucky I arranged to be away from the settlement house this afternoon. Too much mink, my dear, and your hair . . . But we'll have time for that later. Mustn't keep Alicia waiting. She's my latest, and an awfully good cook, but she uses butter and cream and all that sort of thing . . ."

During the short ride from the airport to Aunt Liza's apartment overlooking the lake, Josette had ample time to reflect on the complex personality of her mother's sister. It was true that Liza Devery had an aimless, ineffectual manner that seemed most inefficient. Yet, looking at the record, it was hard to imagine how anyone could have been more efficient during the past thirty years. She had founded a settlement house which was considered a model of helpfulness to the community. The men, women and children with whom she came in contact all fell under her spell. Consequently when Aunt Liza referred to her

"latest" she meant that one of the women she had befriended was acting as her housekeeper temporarily. There had been a succession of such housekeepers, so that Aunt Liza, in the midst of a critical shortage of domestic help, was always adequately cared for.

Her appearance, too, was at complete variance with the way she lived. Aunt Liza had inherited the four-story Victorian house fronting on the lake. It was a happy circumstance that at the very moment she finished converting the house into two duplex apartments, some friends of hers had needed just such living quarters. Although Liza Devery lived like the wealthy woman she was, she always wore a plain skirt and blouse and a shapeless tweed coat that varied in weight but never in style with the changing seasons.

Josette had visited the duplex apartment several times. She had once remarked on how crowded the rooms were. The furniture was beautiful and much of it was inherited. But there was too much of it for the six rooms in which her aunt lived, and all of it required constant care. Josette had once remarked on this fact to her aunt and had suggested that it might be simpler if she took a smaller apartment and got rid of most of the furniture.

"Oh, I don't think so," Aunt Liza had said vaguely. "I'm used to the house and the furniture. Besides, your dear mother would want you to have some of it when you get married to that strait-laced young man of yours. I guess even he would not object to a real Chippendale sofa."

But Liza Devery did not talk about Ed as they sat down to a delicious luncheon prepared by the current housekeeper, Alicia. The woman's cockney accent was scarcely noticeable as she went about her duties with the efficiency of one born to "service" in a castle.

"I don't want to rush you, dear, but as soon as we finish lunch we must get right downtown and do some extensive shopping. I hope your guardian Charles is quite well; never could understand his hobby for stamps. While we are in the stores I can bring you up to date on what I have been doing and this practical nursing course. Your trunk came yesterday, but, my

dear, everything is all wrong. Of course you will live here, but even so . . ."

"Aunt Liza," Josette said firmly, "if we are to get along I really must understand what you are talking about. There were some things you said over the phone that I didn't understand at all. Then you talk about shopping as if I hadn't spent endless hours with the couturier these last three weeks. Just for a change let me ask you some straight questions and then give me some simple, unvarnished answers. Is that okay?"

Liza Devery beamed on her niece and laid down her fork long enough to reach over and pat the velvety softness of Josette's cheek. "You are so like your dear mother. She always wanted to have everything explained to her like a problem in arithmetic. Two and two makes four, you know. No, Josette," she said with a guilty start, "I am not going to go wandering off on another subject. Ask me your questions and I'll give you complete answers."

One of the first questions JoJo asked was why her aunt in her telephone conversation had referred to night air and dirty socks. That was very simple to answer, Liza Devery said at once. The reason she had started the practical nursing course was because so many of the women who came to the settlement house had old-fashioned or superstitious ideas about the treatment of those who were ill. Some of the women, for example, refused to open their bedroom windows on the ground that night air was dangerous to the health. Others relied on the old superstition about tying a dirty sock around a child's neck to cure a sore throat.

"Yes, I understand now." Josette smiled her appreciation of Alicia's apple dumpling with whipped cream and attacked it with vigor. "My next question is: why do you object to my mink coat or to my coiffure?"

"Because, my dear, you will be attending class with women who wear serviceable but shabby coats. They will accept you as my niece, but you don't want to make them conscious of the fact that you are taking up practical nursing because of a whim. Most of them are taking the course either because they have someone

in the family who is desperately ill or because they want to earn money outside the home.

"That is the reason you will have to wear your hair in a different fashion, too: slicked back and perhaps in a bun on the back of your head. There are some young girls enrolled in this class, but most of the women are between forty and fifty. You look so young and glamorous with your present hair-do my dear Josette, that you would make your classmates self-conscious."

"I didn't realize," Josette said humbly. "I will do exactly as you ask. In fact, I feel a little stupid that I didn't think of these things myself."

"How could you think about such things?" her aunt said quickly. "Your whole life has been entirely different. Which brings me to a question I want to ask. Why the sudden interest in practical nursing? Of course I know you are not doing this because of Ed Talbot. *He* hasn't got a drop of human kindness in him."

"Ed doesn't even know why I am here," JoJo confessed, blushing. "He probably wouldn't approve at all." JoJo then told her aunt about the accident and how they had almost crippled Jim Norton for life by bringing him to the hospital. She told her aunt, too, about Doctor Gregory Fielding and how scornful he had been because she did not know enough to leave an accident victim alone.

"I have heard of Gregory Fielding," Liza Devery said thoughtfully. "I believe he served his internship in one of the Chicago hospitals. He's a very intense young man, Josette, and you had better make good at practical nursing if you have promised him you'll try. Now since we've finished lunch . . ."

"Just one more question," JoJo said, as her aunt started to rise. "When I told Doctor Fielding I was going to take up practical nursing here in Chicago, he seemed very pleased and friendly; he said some of the nicest things. Then as I was leaving I told him I would be back in three months. Suddenly he turned into an iceberg. You would have thought I had stabbed him in the back."

Liza Devery smiled indulgently. "My child, you

have quite a lot to learn. When I suggested that you come here for three months I did not say you would become a licensed practical nurse in that short time. But the training you will get will qualify you to be a nurse's aide in the hospital back in Clarkesville. Then it will be up to you. If you want to continue your training you can study some more. Meanwhile you will be helping to some extent. Apparently young Fielding thought you were going to spend a year earning your license. But I imagine he'll be glad to have you even as a nurse's aide. Hospitals need all the help they can get these days. Now let's get going."

If she thought she had been busy preparing to come to Chicago, JoJo found it was nothing compared to the fast pace set by Aunt Liza. First they shopped for some of the most unattractive dresses JoJo had ever seen. Then she invested in several pairs of low-heeled shoes and serviceable stockings. A heavy winter coat in a dull shade of brown and two pairs of woolen mittens were also mandated by her aunt.

That petite dynamo also insisted that Josette practice putting up her hair until Liza finally approved the plainness of her coiffure. Without makeup, and with very little face powder, in her own eyes JoJo looked as drab as she felt. But her aunt did not seem to think the transformation was so complete.

"Those enormous eyes of yours can't be changed by anything we do," she said almost with regret. "I would know you anywhere even if you were dressed in hopsacking and scrubbing a floor."

"Well, I'm glad you left me something of my old self," JoJo murmured, looking with distaste at the tight twist of her hair. "I never thought I really deserved the adjective beautiful, but now I think the best thing you can say for me is that I look plain and clean. Thank heaven Ed can't see me now."

The first day when they went to the settlement house for the start of the classes, Josette found out that there was still more she had to do in order to submerge her glamorous personality. Her aunt made it a practice to stop the limousine two blocks away from the settlement and walk, as all the others did, to the building. Liza Devery walked those two blocks briskly and in

eager anticipation of the day ahead. JoJo kept up with her and faltered only once. That was when she looked up at the unpretentious façade of the settlement house and saw the letters carved in the stone:

JOSETTE DEVERY COMMUNITY CENTER

"You named it after my mother!" JoJo axclaimed. "I never knew that, Aunt Liza. If you don't mind, I would like to study here under the name of Josette Devery."

Her aunt was completely agreeable to this suggestion, and within the hour Josette found herself in a small anditorium with about twenty-five other women. A registered nurse stood on a small raised platform at the end of the room, and a chair had been placed for Liza Devery, who said a few words of welcome. Glancing around the room, JoJo saw that her aunt had been right; practical nursing was something that women of every age could learn. She also agreed with her aunt that the simple dress she wore and her plain hairdo fitted into the picture.

After her aunt sat down the nurse introduced herself as Mary Larsen. She was a heavy-set woman about forty years old, and it was obvious that she knew exactly what she was doing. She passed out pads of paper and pencils to each of the students and warned them that her lecture should be listened to attentively and that notes should be taken on it so that when she questioned them later, they would have the right answers.

Feeling is if she were back in junior college, JoJo sat with pencil pointed. She did not know quite what she expected, but it would not have surprised her if Miss Larsen had given them a series of prescriptions to alleviate pain. Instead, the nurse talked at some length about the attitude of the practical nurse toward the doctor as well as her attitude toward the patient. JoJo could understand why one middle-aged woman with a heavy accent asked:

"You mean we should do as the doc says even when we know it's wrong? When my Alvin had the bad fever, Doc said he should not have meat or potatoes. But he was just skin and bones, Miss Larsen, and he would not eat the lettuce . . ."

Nurse Larsen consulted the chart in front of her.

"Mrs. Morris, I appreciate that when you have brought up eleven children, as I understand you have, it is natural to question a course of treatment that seems strange to you. But believe me, the doctor's only purpose is to help, and you must follow his instructions to the letter."

"But when you got so much to do," one of the younger students protested, "sometimes you forget. Both Mom and Pop work, and I have to take care of little Joey who had the polio. The other three kids go to school, and anyway, they're too young to be much help around the house."

Josette marveled at the way Miss Larsen had all the answers to these distressing problems. The work involved in running a household and caring for the sick was entirely unfamiliar to JoJo, and she developed a profound respect for these women who were so competent and so uncomplaining about their lot. JoJo was completely astonished when a recess was declared for lunch in the settlement cafeteria. She looked forward to the afternoon session, which Miss Larsen had said would be on the topic of preparing the sickroom and making beds.

As they rose to file out, Mrs. Morris said laughingly to JoJo: "She can't teach me nothin' about makin' beds. I must've made up a million since I was ten years old."

"If we work in teams," Josette asked eagerly, "could we work together, Mrs. Morris? This is kind of new to me."

The older woman glanced at Josette's hands and nodded. "I guess you didn't make up many beds before, but I will help you," she said with good humor. "The first thing about bedmaking in my experience is to get the bedclothes. I never have enough."

After lunch, the chairs were pushed back against the wall and a line of cot beds was wheeled out into the center of the floor. Each bed had folded bedclothes piled upon it, and Josette was fortunate enough to have Mrs. Morris as her partner. They stood on either side of the bed, and Josette was sorry that her aunt was not there to watch the proceedings. But Liza

Devery had left the platform early that morning and JoJo had not seen her since.

Once more JoJo discovered that Miss Larsen had several things to say before the actual bedmaking began. First of all, she mentioned the height of the cot, which was the standard twenty inches from the floor. Miss Larsen explained that the cans of sand placed near each bed were designed to be put under the legs at the head and foot of the cot so that is could be raised to hospital height.

"If you have to bend over constantly when you are taking care of someone who is sick," Miss Larsen explained, "you will soon get very tired. You must remember to make it as easy for yourself as you can. When you are tired you are apt to become irritable or careless."

There were more points discussed that were entirely new to JoJo. She learned how to improvise a bed rest out of a straight-backed chair, how to make a bed cradle or a bed table out of a cardboard box. The cradle was to keep the weight of the bedclothes off the patient's feet and the bed table was a crude version of the elaborate affairs Matilda had sometimes brought up to JoJo when she was served breakfast in bed.

It was late in the afternoon, and JoJo was already tired, before the actual instruction in bedmaking began. Nurse Larsen demonstrated how to use an old blanket if no mattress pad was available. She spoke at length on the desirability of having a rubber sheet underneath the first sheet. Then, with quick, deft movements, she tucked a sheet on the top and bottom of the mattress and mitered the corners with a swiftness that left JoJo slightly dazed. In a matter of seconds, it seemed, the demonstration cot was covered with a taut white sheet that made even the thin mattress look inviting.

"Now you girls try it," Miss Larsen said. "I won't hold a stopwatch on you this time, but later on I shall expect you to make up a bed correctly in less than two minutes."

Josette dragged the top end of the sheet toward the head of the bed and started to tuck it under as she

had seen Miss Larsen do. There was an instant protest from Mrs. Morris.

"No, no," she cautioned. "You pull the sheet too far. Watch me. Like this."

JoJo yanked the sheet down and then found that she had not enough left to tuck under. Mrs. Morris, her part of the sheet already tucked neatly under the mattress, waited patiently until JoJo got it straight. Making a "hospital corner" was not too difficult to master. But Josette and her partner had to hurry to make up for lost time. They had just finished tucking in the sides when Miss Larsen paused at the foot of their bed.

"It's pretty lumpy," she said critically, "but all right, I suppose for a first attempt."

"It don't have to be like in a hospital," Mrs. Morris said defensively.

"Yes, it does," the nurse said reprovingly. "You must learn to do it right or I won't give you a passing grade. Here." She reached over the foot of the bed and switched the sheet and under blanket off with one quick gesture. "Now make up the bed again, you two, and see to it that you do it right. If you don't you'll just have to try again."

Chapter 6

JOSETTE DEVERY DECOURCY came back to her Aunt Liza's apartment several nights later completely depressed. She had finally mastered the difficult art of bedmaking well enough to pass even Miss Larsen's critical inspection. But the second day had been even worse; she had to make the bed with Mrs. Morris *in* it, and in her zeal to make the change quickly, JoJo had pulled out the undersheet before Mrs. Morris had quite braced herself for it. To JoJo's utter dismay, the sturdily built figure of her partner rolled over on one side and then disappeared!

Mrs. Morris was very nice about the accident. It could, she said, happen to anyone who was unused to handling someone who was sick. But Miss Larsen did not mince words. She held Josette up as a horrible example of the harm the practical nurse could bring about if she did not know the correct way to do things.

"If you think you are not capable of taking care of a sick person, by all means refuse the task," Miss Larsen concluded. "Now, Mrs. Morris, if you are ready, we will try that again."

Mrs. Morris bravely accepted the challenge, and JoJo, although she had tears in her eyes, managed to change the bed, with her partner in it, in the correct way.

After that, JoJo took care not to do anything conspicuous if she could help it. Even when she discovered that she did not know how to hold a washcloth properly in order to wash a patient, she doggedly put

her mind to learning the exact folds of the cloth around her hand and gingerly practiced on the patient, Mrs. Morris, who started giggling and could hardly stop.

"What's the matter?" demanded JoJo in annoyance.

"You're tickling me," the motherly woman gasped. "I ain't no china doll. Go ahead; bear down on that washcloth." Mrs. Morris kept her voice low, and the eagle-eyed Miss Larsen noticed nothing amiss.

Class that day had been different. The nurse had introduced a Doctor Craighurst and told the class that he would give them instruction in care of those outside the home. The doctor had brought special manikins with him, so the class might have graphic illustrations of some of the emergencies they might be called upon to meet.

Dr. Craighurst was a small, nondescript-looking man whose impersonal manner and dry, clipped phrases reminded Josette of the psychology professor they had had in college. He was talking about traffic accidents and the increasing number of them in all cities and on the highways. But his presentation of the statistics—the number of persons taken to hospitals, the high number of fatalities and other gruesome details—were all minimized by his impassive expression and droning voice. Then he said, nodding toward the back of the room:

"Now, if you ladies will turn around, we will have our first 'accident' presentation."

Obediently they all swung around and saw that the part of the room that had been curtained off was now open. Against the wall was a canvas painting showing the side of a road, with fields in the distance and the edge of a concrete highway at the bottom. It was not very well done, and JoJo thought it most unconvincing. Then her glance dropped to the floor and she saw three lifeless bodies—a woman and two men—lying awkwardly about as if they had been hurled to the ground by a giant hand. The man in the center lay on his back, his face with its blank eyes turned upward. He was wearing a white shirt, and one arm was fastened to his shoulder, the torn shirt showed, by only a thin strip of flesh.

JoJo could not take her eyes off the figure. And

then, even while she stared in horrified fascination, she saw the red blood gushing out in a thick, almost black stream. Josette promptly fainted.

"I heard about it," Aunt Liza said that night as JoJo came into the apartment. "You did a very good demonstration of fainting and the class had a real live model to work on."

"I'm so ashamed!"

"No need to be," Aunt Liza said, smiling. "I hear that even strong men sometimes faint when they suddenly see those training manikins. The red ink they use for blood is enough to turn anyone's stomach. Anyway," Liza Devery patted her niece's arm fondly, "you went all through your classes this afternoon. That took real guts."

"Aunt Liza—" JoJo hesitated; she hated to say it, but the truth had to be faced—"maybe I can't do this after all. Study practical nursing, I mean. Perhaps, as Doctor Fielding said, I haven't the conviction and dedication needed for any type of nursing."

"Nonsense!" Liza Devery shook her white head vehemently. "You're just upset, partly, I shouldn't at all wonder, because you didn't get a phone call from Ed Talbot last night. But here's a big fat letter. I haven't studied practical nursing, my dear—" Aunt Liza smiled—"but I'm going to tell you what to do. First you are going to get undressed and take a good hot bath with the fanciest bath salts we have. Then settle yourself on the chaise longue, and Alicia will bring your supper on a tray. You just relax and read your letter and dream of your Prince Charming."

Her very words made JoJo feel a lot better. She dropped a kiss on her aunt's forehead and sped up the stairs to her room. She looked at the letter but resisted opening it. Instead, she kissed it lightly. It would stay there in a tantalizing spot on the bureau until she had had her bath. She felt that she should be in the mood to read about another kind of life.

Wrapped in her most becoming negligee, with her hair brushed into a shining satin mane, Josette again picked up the letter and leaned back against the pillows on the chaise longue. Then she tore open the

envelope and plunged into the contents of Ed's long letter. She read:

"Dear Heart: I miss you terribly. Don't know what I did before you came into my life, my precious one. I've been keeping my nose to the grindstone ever since you left, not because I wasn't asked, mind you, but because any party I was invited to would seem mighty dull without my own girl. I did go to one affair—sort of a command performance on account of Mother. My harum-scarum little sister, Flip, brought a character named 'Slats' Ricciardo. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could see him. But Flip says he dances divinely!

"I've already made two flying trips to Washington, and I'll have to go back there again sometime next week. So I won't see you before the Christmas holidays, though I had hoped to fly out to you if only for a weekend. Josette darling, Washington is a city you'll love. I want to rent one of those quaint little houses in Georgetown. I want to be by your side when we go to one of the Embassy balls. I want to enjoy with you the interesting and dynamic people we will meet who are concerned with the really big and vital problems of the day.

"It is all right for your aunt to fuss around with a settlement house project and mingle day after day with the defeated and depressed. But you are young and beautiful. You should be in Washington with me where you will make a great contribution by your presence alone. And I want to show you off. There, you see I'm shameless enough to admit it.

"It's really a pity that I am so much of a lawyer I can't write much of a love letter. But you will just have to put up with me, my darling, and read between the lines. So, in the only way I know how to say it, here goes:

"Whereas, we were meant for each other;

"Whereas, I see your gray eyes glowing at me like stars every night just before I drop off to sleep;

"Whereas, you are stubborn, wilful and slightly nuts about some things;

"Whereas, your kisses haunt me by day as well as by night;

"Be it resolved: I love you, I love you, I love you. And unless you come home and stay here until you marry me there will be the devil to pay, according to due process of law."

Josette DeCourcy sat dreaming with the letter in her hand. This was the life for which she had been trained, and this was the life she knew. She marveled briefly that known criminals were so adept as living a double life. She found it difficult to practice even the small deception of pretending to be anyone else but a debutante and a future society leader.

At any rate, Josette resolved later that night just before she dropped off to sleep, she could not let Aunt Liza down at the moment. Two of the women had already dropped out of the class, one because she was going to have a baby and the other because she had moved to another city. So it was up to her to keep on being Josette Devery, Aunt Liza's poor relation who was being supported while she learned a useful profession. Ed had called her wilful and stubborn. But she preferred to think of herself as loyal and steadfast.

Oddly enough, the practical nursing classes seemed to be easier for JoJo to take after that one day. She found she was really good at dressings and bandages and earned a nod of approval from the critical Miss Larsen. It made sense to her when she was told not to put absorbent cotton directly on an open wound. It also made sense that a bandage should be applied only over a dressing on cuts.

In the classes conducted by various doctors who contributed their time, she also learned to recognize some symptoms. Josette still had moments when she was ashamed of her lack of general knowledge. For example, when the doctor asked the class what should be done if a person, either adult or child, complained of a stomachache, all the students were unusually quiet. To JoJo, the question seemed simple enough, and finally she spoke up.

"You should give them a laxative, of course," she said impatiently. "I can't understand why that is considered a problem at all, Doctor Craighurst."

There was an instant's stunned silence, and then a wave of laughter swept over the audience. Doctor Craighurst, as impassive as ever, still seemed to glow with an inner satisfaction. Too late, JoJo realized she had stepped into a trap. By the time she had had the symptoms of acute appendicitis explained to her, and exactly how devastating a laxative could be to someone who was suffering from an inflamed appendix, JoJo's morale was extremely low. But, she admitted to herself, she had learned the lesson well; she would be cautious in the future if anyone mentioned an upset stomach.

JoJo also learned to watch and wait for the other students in the class. They might not know practical nursing according to the book, but they seemed to sense the limitations of their knowledge. Her attitude paid off when they began to study the emergency treatment of serious burns. This time it was Mrs. Morris who was sure that plenty of olive oil should be applied at once. Doctor Craighurst, like a wily serpent, asked smoothly what she would do if the burned area had been covered. He gave as an example the fact that a person might be working at a stove and her sleeve might catch fire, so that the arm was seriously burned.

"So you pull off the sleeve, of course," Mrs. Morris said with authority. "Then pour on plenty olive oil, or maybe butter if that's all you got . . ."

Doctor Craighurst, looking as if he were enjoying the session, asked another woman what she would do. She suggested using an antiseptic or maybe a little goose grease. Doctor Craighurst posed the question to a few other students and they all gave answers that were variations of the two he had already had. Finally he called a halt; apparently he had tired of the game.

"I may as well tell you," he said dryly, "you are all wrong. The first thing to do is to get a doctor. If you must do something, help the patient to lie down and make sure the head is slightly lower than the body. Don't—I repeat, don't—touch the clothing or the burned area. Don't put on oil, grease, antiseptic or anything else. If it takes some time for the doctor to get there, put on a dry compress that is clean, sterile if

possible, and bandage the compress in place. You must learn, ladies, that your duties as practical nurse do not include the diagnosis and treatment of either a burn or an illness. You will save the patient a lot of pain and yourself a lot of heartache if you call the doctor right away."

Once she became interested in her studies JoJo found the time passed very quickly. Even Ed's nightly phone call from Clarkesville or Washington no longer had the power to disturb her. She was honest in admitting to herself that this might be because she saw a period to her class work, at least during the Christmas holidays.

The week before Christmas JoJo was overjoyed to hear that Aunt Liza had decided to go with her back to Clarkesville. She herself was as excited as a child, and Liza arranged for the practical nursing classes to close on Thursday of the week preceding Christmas. Josette immediately made a date at the beauty parlor for Friday morning and felt as she lunched with her aunt that she again looked the part of the debutante she was.

For her return she chose a nubby, short-jacketed tweed suit, with a collarless neckline and slim straight skirt. Her high-heeled pumps seemed strange after the serviceable flat shoes she had been wearing, but in a moment she would get used to them again. She pulled a beaver shako over her sleek black hair and threw her beaver greatcoat about her shoulders. Aunt Liza looked up appreciatively as she came down the stairs.

"Well, my dear, Charles Overton can't blame me for having you stay here these past few weeks. I think the change has done you a lot of good; you look positively radiant," she added fondly.

At the Clarkesville airport, Uncle Chuck seemed to feel the same way. He was ordinarily not a demonstrative man, but he hugged Josette as if he had missed her very much. He was not looking very well, JoJo thought with a pang, and then wondered if her brief training as a practical nurse had made her over-eager to look for symptoms. As if he sensed her reaction, Charles Overton said apologetically:

"I've lost a little weight, but it's nothing to worry

about. Just a little upset stomach. I'll be all right now that you're back home. So will Ed Talbot," he added, winking at Liza. "Ed is flying from Washington tomorrow. You and I," he assured Liza, "will have to do the town on our own when he gets here. The young folks won't have a minute to spare for us old fogies."

JoJo was glad to have a few hours to try to reach Doctor Gregory Fielding. She wanted to tell him how mistaken she had been about the length of time it took to get a license as a practical nurse. She suspected that he would be quite agreeable when she told him that she could not give up a year to the study of the subject but that she was glad she had even a smattering of knowledge.

"I must have been awfully dumb when I told you I was going to learn practical nursing in three months," she told him late that afternoon. JoJo had been fortunate in finding the popular young surgeon in his office at the hospital. In contrast to the coldness of his manner when they had parted, his attitude was warm and friendly.

"You did rather surprise me when you said you'd be through with your studies the end of February," he said with a boyish grin. "But afterward I realized how very little you knew of the field you were entering. Very few people realize that the training of a practical nurse is as broad as that of a registered nurse; the difference lies in the depth of training."

"I goofed time after time," JoJo admitted. "In fact, all the other women in the class thought I was pretty much of a dunce. But it is a fascinating career, and I only wish I could see my way clear to getting a full license."

"That's all I wanted to hear," Doctor Fielding said happily. "Even after three months' training, I can put you on the staff here in the First Ward Hospital. You can make yourself useful. Later on, if I can persuade the directors of the hospital to let me set up practical nursing classes, you can carry on with your studies."

JoJo was taken aback by his words. She had thought that he would not be at all interested in her if she could not obtain a license. But she did not want to

refuse his offer abruptly. She did not want to tell him that she had practically decided she would not return to Chicago with Aunt Liza and would not finish even three months of training.

To cover her confusion, JoJo inquired about the welfare of Jim Norton. He was still in a nursing home, Dr. Fielding told her, but he had shown great improvement and was walking around now without even a cane. The only reason he hadn't been dismissed was that Doctor Fielding felt it would be hard on the old man to go back to a lonely room and try to find odd jobs to pay his way.

"I would be willing to pay his room rent," JoJo said eagerly, "for a few months at least. I think Jim Norton would trust me to take care of him without any strings attached. I have been holding his life insurance policy, but of course I will give that back to him when he is on his own again."

"You have the policy?" Doctor Fielding demanded. "So that's why Jim Norton was so mysterious about it. Do you have it with you?"

JoJo admitted that she had brought the soiled white envelope, but she explained that Jim had not wanted her to give it to anyone else. The young surgeon brushed aside her objections, and reluctantly JoJo handed the policy to him.

"I don't see that it makes any difference," she said with a shrug. "After all, you are his doctor, and I should think you ought to be the first to know the terms of his insurance. However, I understand from Jim that it is a straight life insurance policy made out in the name of some friend of his who will see that he gets a handsome funeral. But since he is far from dead, it does not make any difference who holds the policy."

Doctor Gregory Fielding had unfolded the legal-looking document and studied it in silence for a minute. Then he folded it up again and put it in the top drawer of his desk, which he carefully locked.

"It may not seem important to you," he said slowly, "but it seems most important to me. As I told you, Jim Norton is recovering nicely from his broken hip. He won't be able to cash in on this policy, nor can his

friend collect unless he is dead. If he lives for several years to come, I have a feeling that this 'friend' may be disappointed in the return he gets for all the premium money he's had to pay out."

Chapter 7

JoJo FOUND that Uncle Chuck was right about there being no time once Ed had arrived from Washington. As she waited at the airport for his plane to land, she could feel excitement bubbling within her. It was different from her usual feeling toward Ed Talbot. When she had accepted his proposal she had had a warm, safe feeling, as if she were a ship coming into a sheltered harbor. But after a month away from him this feeling had been replaced by one of high, reckless abandon. JoJo knew that if Ed had suggested they run away and get married that very night, she would have gone off without a second thought.

Ed seemed to have something of the same feeling. He dropped his attaché case, swept her into his arms and kissed her so long and so ardently that it was JoJo who at last drew away.

"My goodness," she said lightly, although she knew that her cheeks were rosy and her eyes dancing. "Is this what they teach you in the diplomatic corps? I shouldn't think that the nations would feel at all belligerent if every diplomat had as much good will toward others."

"Don't joke about the world situation, darling," he admonished her. "It's far more serious than you think. But for now we're just going to forget all about it. I haven't seen my girl in a long time, and I'm going to begrudge every minute I have to share you with others."

JoJo went to his home with Ed and admired Mrs.

Talbot's beautiful Christmas decorations. But they stayed less than an hour because, as Ed pointed out, he still had to do his Christmas shopping. There was a light snow falling as they went from store to store with Christmas carols echoing in their ears. Ed insisted that she accompany him to pick out her own gift. JoJo knew it was childish, but she would have much preferred to have Ed select some silly little bauble and give it to her as a surprise. Instead, at his insistence, she picked out a set of matched luggage that was both handsome and expensive.

"You'll need it for the honeymoon," Ed explained, and JoJo tried to take a more romantic attitude toward the gift. But she felt rather guilty that her gift for Ed, already wrapped and tied with fancy ribbon, was only a pair of plain cuff links.

That night they had dinner with Uncle Chuck and Aunt Liza, and Ed was a gay companion. He described some of the faux pas that had been committed at the formal dinner parties he had attended in Washington. He had them all laughing about the time a dignified matron had danced around the ballroom with her skirt held well above her knees. She was wearing a satin gown with a long train, Ed explained, and she picked up the train and threw it over her right arm. Her partner unfortunately held her right arm high, and they had circled the room twice before the stately woman realized she was the cynosure of all eyes.

Sunday passed in a whirl of church services and a roast duck dinner. That night, which was Christmas Eve, the younger crowd went from house to house singing Christmas carols. At each house they were invited in. It was after three o'clock in the morning when JoJo got into bed. She had meant to think of what she should do about returning to Chicago with Aunt Liza. But she could not keep her mind on the problem. The minute she shut her eyes she was sound asleep.

Christmas Day was comparatively quiet but most satisfactory. Mrs. Talbot held open house Christmas afternoon, as was her usual custom. JoJo had scarcely a minute to call her own. All the debutantes crowded around her and wanted to hear the latest news of the

social whirl in Chicago. When JoJo admitted that she had not done much partying, they looked at her in open disbelief. One deb even went so far as to say:

"If I were Ed Talbot I'd be plenty worried about having my fiancée running around in Chicago alone, especially when she doesn't account for her time. Maybe, like Flip, she has found a handsome stranger and doesn't want to go with the old crowd any more."

"That's right; I haven't seen Flip since I've been back," JoJo said, seizing the chance to turn the subject. "I understand her new heart throb is quite good-looking and dances divinely. We were just talking about your sister," JoJo told her fiancé as Ed joined the group.

But all Ed Talbot said was: "Forget it, girls. I'll handle the situation when the time comes. Now I have a suggestion. Let's all go skiing Wednesday."

Josette was wearing her ski outfit and had her skis and other impedimenta piled in the front hall when Ed arrived early on Wednesday morning. She had been hearing the sound of bells for a few minutes past, but was hardly conscious of the sound, connecting it vaguely with children playing some game in the snow that covered familiar lawns and shrubbery. She held the front door open as Ed began piling up her things, and it was only when she started down the front steps after him that she saw the old-fashioned, horse-drawn sleigh waiting in the roadway.

"Ed!" she cried. "A real old-time sleigh!" Then she looked down the road as a horse neighed. There was another sleigh behind the one in front of the house, and behind that another and another.

"It's a parade!" Ed was now grinning at her, as she stared in amazement at the procession. "Why," she went on, as she caught sight of the couple in the next sleigh and looked beyond it, "there's Flip and Myra and—" She was interrupted by a chorus from all the sleighs:

"Hurrah for JoJo and Ed! Ray! Ray! Ray!"

"What . . .?" began Josette.

Flip had jumped out of her sleigh and was now smothering JoJo in a bear hug. "The young Perry

Delafields are giving you and Ed a surprise engagement party at the Ski Club! Ed knew about it, but he didn't tell, did he? You're surprised, aren't you, JoJo?"

"I'm stunned," cried Josette. "It's the loveliest surprise I ever had. I thought it was going to be a dance at the country club." She ran along the line of sleighs, pulling Ed by the hand. The girls stopped them at every vehicle with kisses impartially bestowed on both JoJo and Ed, while the men shook Ed's hand vigorously and aimed kisses at Josette, which she dodged expertly, laughing and patting them on their cheeks or ski caps as she fled onward. She was breathless when she reached Naomi and Perry Delafield, who were bringing up the rear.

"I'm ecstatic!" she murmured, embracing each in turn. "I think I'm going to cry, I'm so happy."

"If you do, your eyelashes will freeze," warned Perry Delafield. "Run back now and say 'Giddap' to your horse. Heigho, everybody, on your mark!" Then as JoJo and Ed scrambled into their sleigh and pulled the fur rug over them, "Go! Go! Go!" Ed shouted, cracked his whip in the air, and the horses' feet moved soundlessly on the snowy road, to the accompaniment of the gay music of the sleigh bells.

Horses and sleighs found shelter at the foot of the ski tow leading to the Ski Clubhouse. It was a private Ski Club, complete with airlift, and was the facsimile of a larger skiing outfit in Switzerland. Around the building on all four sides was a broad paved terrace, and it was there that the party assembled for what Perry Delafield said was the first item on the agenda. JoJo and Ed were sent indoors to await a signal while the band, four musicians in Tyrolean costume, were lined up against one terrace railing and swung into a lively Alpine tune. Then Flip and her young man, the stranger she introduced to JoJo as "Slats" Ricciardo, were sent to fling open the double doors. Ed and JoJo, waiting just inside, by request, found themselves facing an archway of crossed skis, held high above the heads of the other guests, forming an aisle.

The little band struck up the bridal march, everybody sang whatever words they remembered, and JoJo and Ed, walking sedately under the arch of skis, promptly turned around and walked back when they reached the end of the aisle, the music returning again to the lively Swiss tune. This time as they reached the doorway Ed and JoJo seized each other's hands and began an impromptu version of a square dance, with the others joining in as soon as they could dispose of their skis.

"Josette, honey, you'll have to set the date now," whispered Ed in JoJo's ear during a lull in the wild cavorting. "Everybody is all eyes and ears."

JoJo, with Ed's arm tight around her, smiled happily.

"Later," she murmured.

"No," said Ed, his tone decisive, "now."

Josette drew away and, still smiling, gazed at him for a long moment. His better-than-six-feet towered above her, and she had to raise her eyes, at such close quarters, to catch the glitter of his golden, hatless head in the brilliant winter sunshine. He was wearing a blue ski outfit the exact color of his cobalt-blue eyes, and he looked, JoJo thought, with his bronzed skin and uplifted square chin, for all the world like a young viking, braving wind and unknown dangers of the sea, in the prow of a dragon-headed ship. Ed was undoubtedly the handsomest man she had ever seen.

Almost without meaning to, Josette heard herself speaking.

"June, Ed darling," she said softly. Next minute she was in his arms and he was kissing her as if he would never stop.

"Hi there!" someone shouted. "What's going on? Why this unseemly outburst of affection?"

Ed released JoJo, but kept one arm around her shoulders.

"Josette has just let me in on a secret," he said, raising voice. "Josette is going to be a June bride," Ed went on, "and I'm going to be a June bridegroom!"

"Hear! Hear!" shouted Perry Delafield, leading the applause, which was a deafening combination of clapping, whistling and foot stamping. "We'll drink to

that!" he called, as the noise died down a little. "Everybody inside!"

There was a rush for the big room where hot mulled cider and fragrant doughnuts were waiting on a long table in front of the open fire. Amid the toasts and the barrage of good wishes flung their way, JoJo and Ed circulated among the crowd, smiled their thanks and managed somehow to drink their mugs of cider and nibble their doughnuts.

JoJo wondered at the sudden letdown in her feelings as she made the rounds. She loved Ed—of course she did. She was terrifically happy, wasn't she? Of course she was. This handsome viking, who was undoubtedly slated for a distinguished career as a diplomat, was actually in love with her. Wasn't he telling all their friends so? JoJo winced a little as he explained to a couple standing in a window alcove: "My mother was really the power behind the throne in this romance. She started telling me, as long ago as last year when Josette made her debut, that no matter how long I looked, I'd never find a girl better suited than Josette to be a diplomat's wife. She needs schooling, naturally, in the art of taking her place in the international set, but she'll learn. I'll be only too happy to teach her!"

But once out on the ski slope, winging her way with Ed down the miniature mountain—they were both accomplished skiers—Josette's misgivings vanished in the crisp air that blew her hair (now released from its Aunt Liza-inspired bun) straight out behind her and stung her cheeks to a peony glow. They made the run repeatedly, as did most of the others, and turned toward the clubhouse only when finally summoned to the "spicy goulash gala" with a Viennese accent, which Perry Delafield termed the engagement dinner which had been provided.

The guests, their appetites ferocious after the afternoon in the open air, devoured sauerkraut and potato pancakes along with the goulash of veal enlivened with paprika, cayenne pepper, garlic and onion as if, one of the crowd remarked, "there were no calories to be reckoned with, come weighing in day."

JoJo was proud of Ed when he stood beside the fire

after dinner, and sang, by request, a rollicking drinking song which he had learned in college. He had a well-trained baritone, and as she stood beside him, joining in the chorus he had long ago taught her, she felt that she must be the happiest girl in the world.

But the festivities at last came to an end. They returned homeward, still singing some of the more rollicking carols. As they drove through the snowy streets of Clarkesville proper, the Christmas lights glowed along the way, and JoJo thought the whole town looked like an animated Christmas card. The passers-by stood on the sidewalk and watched as they slowed the horses to a walk and sang, ever more softly:

"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen."

It was the end of a perfect day.

Aunt Liza was waiting for her decision, Josette knew. The older woman seemed to understand her niece's indecision about returning to Chicago, but she did not press the subject even though on New Year's Eve little time remained. Aunt Liza had been firm about going back to Chicago the day after New Year's. JoJo, as she dressed for the New Year's Ball at the Clarkesville Hotel, knew that she would have to speak with her aunt that night.

She had not again seen Doctor Fielding, although she had thought of him more than once. She felt that if she did not go through with her training for at least the next two months, she would never see Gregory Fielding again.

"Perhaps that would be just as well, my girl," JoJo told her reflection in the mirror. She saw a grave, wistful face with large gray eyes looking back at her. "You are getting altogether too interested in a dedicated young man whose profession comes first."

And what about Aunt Liza? Could she bear to disappoint her aunt, who had been so kind and understanding?

JoJo slipped into a silvery sheath that was cunningly draped to follow the classic lines of Grecian maidens of the Golden Age. Her hair was piled high in a satin swirl and held back by a tiara of grey pearls that matched her eyes. Grey pearl earrings and her star

sapphire engagement ring were her only other jewels.

Giving herself a long last look in the pier glass before she left the room, JoJo seemed to see instead Josette Devery, practical nurse. The plain dress, the unbecoming hairdo and the flat-heeled shoes worn by that other self looked scornfully at the stunning debutante she was tonight.

"Josette, my dear, Ed has arrived. It's already after eleven. . . ." Aunt Liza's clear voice floated up the stairway.

"Coming!" JoJo picked up her mink stole and silver evening bag and left the room. At the turn in the stairs she paused. Aunt Liza and Ed stood there, looking up.

"Happy New Year!" JoJo caroled at them.

"It's Happy *Our* Year," Ed said with a grin.

Aunt Liza forced a smile. "I know it will be a wonderful year for both of you," she said with false brightness. Josette knew that at that moment, Aunt Liza was admitting defeat. She suddenly looked several years older and quite forlorn.

Chapter 8

To JoJo's surprise, once she had decided to go back to Chicago with Aunt Liza and had told her aunt of the decision she had made, there was a sense of release. For one thing, she knew it was right to stay with her aunt and continue the classes until the three month period was up. Also, Ed had been called back to Washington for an indefinite period and made only a token protest when she told him she would return to Chicago.

JoJo was uneasy about only one thing: Uncle Chuck did not look well, and with her training as a practical nurse—slight thought it had been—still fresh in her mind, his ward was increasingly anxious about him. But Charles Overton was stubborn; he refused to see a doctor or to admit that he was sick in any way. JoJo suspected that he was actually glad to see her go back to Chicago in order to escape her nagging comments.

There was another surprise awaiting her, too. The classes in practical nursing which had seemed so difficult when she arrived in Chicago in November now seemed challenging but not too hard to master. In fact, as she put on her plain black dress and twisted her hair up into a bun preparatory to attending the first class of the new year, JoJo actually felt a sense of relief.

No longer did she have to worry about the complicated relationships that always developed in her social set. Even her dates with Ed Talbot, exciting and gay though they had been, had kept her mind occupied with personalities rather than with abstract problems.

Here in Chicago, greeting Mrs. Morris after the holidays, Josette was struck again by the difference between her effervescent world and the down to earth surroundings in which the phlegmatic matron moved.

"Did you have a wonderful Christmas?" JoJo asked her.

"Christmas—it is always the same." Mrs. Morris shrugged. "My daughter had a baby Christmas Eve and my husband came down with the flu. Always something. But yes, we had a good Christmas, pretty good. For the *kinder,* anyway. And you too? It was a nice Christmas, no?"

"It was nice," JoJo agreed. She could not hope to make Mrs. Morris understand the thrill of driving through the snow in a horse-drawn sleigh with the bells jingling in the crisp winter air. She could not begin to describe how easy it was to forget all worldly cares when you were flying down a mountainside on well-waxed skis. Mrs. Morris knew that this other world without care or worry did really exist. But she would never comprehend how it felt to be part of that world, and JoJo thought it better not to tell her about it.

After the first hour the class was functioning as if it had never been interrupted. Miss Larsen had chosen the morning hours to reveiw briefly what they had studied. JoJo was amazed to find they had covered such a variety of subjects and that she remembered clearly most of what she had been taught. If anything more had been needed to convince her that she had done the right thing in returning to Chicago, the morning session in practical nursing left no doubt in her mind.

One sharp glance at her niece as they sat down to a late dinner seemed to convince Aunt Liza, too. She smiled and looked relieved for the first time since they had left Clarkesville.

"I must confess to you, Josette dear, that I had my qualms about bringing you back to this rather humdrum existence," she admitted. "When I saw you coming down the stairs on New Year's Eve, all in silver and dressed like a princess, I felt like a selfish old woman. I realized that no matter what you said, I had no right to take you away from the position to which

you had been born. I myself never wanted any part of the social whirl; I wanted only to serve."

"And that you have done, my darling aunt."

"At any rate I've tried," Liza Devery said modestly. "Perhaps if I had been as beautiful as you are and if I had found a handsome young man like Ed Talbot to look after me with his heart in his eyes, I would not have been so altrustic. But we all must live our lives as we see fit. I would have accepted your decision to remain in Clarkesville if that was the way you had wanted it."

JoJo regarded her aunt fondly. "I know you would always understand, Aunt Liza, just as you understood when I first came here so full of grand ideas about my mission to help others and my ability to do anything I wanted to. If practical nursing has done nothing else," she interrupted herself to say, "it has taught me to be a little more humble in my approach to something new."

JoJo and her aunt, by common consent, continued their discussion for several hours. Liza Devery pointed out once more that the dedicated life of nursing, while it appealed to many women, was not necessarily the right vocation for all of them. In turn, JoJo admitted that during the Christmas holidays she had found the return to her glamorous life as a debutante quite absorbing. She told her aunt, too, about her promise to Ed Talbot that she would marry him in June.

"But then why did you come back with me?" Liza Devery asked in a puzzled tone. "I am going to reorganize the practical nursing classes in March, but by that time you will have had only three months' training. It is unlikely that after you are married you will ever use the knowledge you have acquired."

"Of course I will!" JoJo removed the hairpins from her tight bun and shook her hair free. "Everything that I have learned so far in practical nursing and everything I will learn in the next two months will make me a better and more understanding person. I don't believe it really matters whether or not I get a license as a practical nurse, or whether I hold Doctor Fielding to his offer to let me work as a nurse's aide back in Clarkesville." JoJo could feel the color rising in her cheeks as Aunt Liza looked at her inquiringly. "He did prom-

ise me a job when I had finished three month's training."

Liza Devery was experienced enough not to force further confidences. JoJo was quite willing to discuss the turmoil she felt whenever she thought of abandoning her idea of helping others, or of giving up the glittering life she would have if she returned to her own world. But Aunt Liza, frankly yawning, gave her no chance to say more. She gave JoJo a hasty good night kiss, and Josette Devery, student of practical nursing, fell asleep as soon as she got into bed.

JoJo threw herself wholeheartedly into her studies and found herself looking forward with eager anticipation to each day's class. She became fond of Mrs. Morris, and the many problems the woman had to face because of her large family and limited income intrigued her, too. In spite of the difference in their ages, Mrs. Morris seemed to get a certain amount of comfort from telling JoJo just what latest crisis was confronting her household. The day after Mr. Morris lost his job, for example, she poured out the whole story during their brief lunch hour.

"I told Lou he ought to quit six months ago," Mrs. Morris said bravely. "But we do need the money, and I was hoping I could get work as a practical nurse before he had to look for another job. But he couldn't stand the aggravation, and he had a big fight with his boss." She shrugged resignedly. "So he's out of work. We will get along somehow."

JoJo inquired cautiously about the kind of job Mr. Morris might want. He was a good construction man, Mrs. Morris said proudly. He could do almost anything, and he could climb up on the steel girders and walk around as sure-footed as a mountain goat.

She said nothing to Mrs. Morris, but that night JoJo wrote a long air-mail letter to Charles Overton. She explained that she had met Mrs. Morris during her stay with Aunt Liza and that the good woman was trying very hard to keep her family together. It would be wonderful, JoJo wrote frankly, if Uncle Chuck could, through his numerous financial contacts, arrange for the woman's husband to get a new job quickly.

A beaming Mrs. Morris told JoJo a few days later that her husband had been very lucky. A big construction company had sent word to him, through what JoJo gathered was a kind of grapevine among the workers, to apply for a job on a new project that was getting under way, and he had been hired, at a slight raise in wages. As Josette suspected, the whole thing had been planned and put into effect through Uncle Chuck, who told her, when he answered her letter, that he wanted the man to feel that getting the job was due to his own efforts.

Meanwhile JoJo had been engrossed in what Miss Larsen referred to as the study of home emergencies. Up to this time Josette DeCourcy had never considered what was to be done if someone at the dinner table, for instance, choked on a piece of steak, what to do in the case of a sprained ankle before the victim could be treated by a doctor, how to improvise a variety of bandages when they were needed suddenly for different parts of the body, how to take temperatures, how to make hot applications, both dry and moist, how to prepare a sickroom properly and how to guard against electric shock from home appliances. In JoJo's experience any kind of emergency was always the problem of someone else, and it had never occurred to her that there was anything a bystander, particularly herself, could do to lessen the pain or prevent further injury in case of sudden illness or accident.

The accident to Jim Norton and Doctor Fielding's subsequent contempt for the ignorance she had displayed in dealing with the situation had been her first inkling of her lack of the basic knowledge that any responsible adult might be expected to have.

In her enthusiasm for assimilating routine knowledge as quickly as possible, JoJo often went about the apartment memorizing aloud the procedures she had charted in her notebook; some with drawings, as in the case of the bandages. The first time Aunt Liza heard JoJo muttering, as she paced along the upper hall of the duplex, such phrases as:

"The apex of the triangular bandage goes behind the elbow of the injured arm"; or "Be sure that the knots of bandages are located in places where they can easily

be reached and where they don't make the patient uncomfortable," she couldn't make sense of these apparently rambling sentences.

"Josette dear," she asked that evening, "don't you feel well? Are you feverish?"

"Why, Aunt Liza, I'm fine." JoJo stopped her pacing and stared, bewildered for a moment, at her aunt. "Oh, you think I'm delirious!" She burst into laughter and for a few seconds could not speak at all. "I'm just memorizing the instructions I got in class today," she finally managed to say. "I can't stop to find my notebook if I see somebody choking at the dinner table, can I? I have to have it all down by heart, so I can act fast."

"I never thought about it, but you're right, of course," said Aunt Liza. "By the way, what do you do if somebody chokes on something when eating?" she inquired. "I always thought pounding them on the back was standard procedure."

"That's part of the treatment," said JoJo. "But you ought to do more than that. The victim should bend forward, and then you should strike him sharply on the back between the shoulder blades. If possible, the victim should lie face downward across a bed or a table, with head and shoulders hanging off, and then you give him the sharp slap on the back. If it's a child who is choking and he isn't too heavy, you hold him upside down by the heels and slap his back."

"And will that always work? Dislodge the obstruction, I mean?" asked Aunt Liza.

"If it doesn't, the only thing to do is to rush the victim to a hospital. Or if a doctor has been called, he may arrive in time to do what is necessary."

"I never realized that eating could be so dangerous," sighed Aunt Liza. "I should have, I suppose. But people don't think about these things if they've never been faced with them. I'm beginning to think everybody, women anyway, ought to have a course in practical nursing."

"It's sensible, that's sure." JoJo flipped over the pages of her notebook which she had left lying on a side table. "Look, Aunt Liza, here's something everybody should be prepared for—electric shock from home ap-

pliances such as radios in the bathroom or washing machines in a basement or appliances with frayed cords. There are all sorts of hazards connected with electric equipment. Do you know the quickest way to get an electric shock in the kitchen?"

"Well, I'm never in the kitchen; not to use any appliances, at least. But no, I never figured out the best way to get an electric shock there. I was never trying to get an electric shock, as a matter of fact."

"You don't have to try very hard. Suppose you have your hand on an appliance with a frayed cord and you touch a faucet with the other hand. You could get a dandy electric shock—something really dangerous," said JoJo.

Aunt Liza looked impressed. "Imagine!" she said. "You know, I never thought of practical nursing as anything but smoothing pillows for a sick person or giving medicine according to the doctor's directions."

"It's really training for ordinary life," JoJo said importantly, "like adding vitamins to the diet when needed. Of course, it's also wonderful training for an assistant to nurses in a hospital and for treating at home people who don't require a registered nurse or hospitalization. People with chronic diseases or who are bedridden for any cause are also cared for properly by practical nurses, who thereby free members of the family who would find themselves overburdened by the care of the sick."

At Christmas time the two months of study she had thought of as a long period of hard work seemed to stretch endlessly into the future, but January was gone almost before JoJo realized it. Now it was February, and nearing the end of the month at that.

"I'm a little sorry that I promised to return to Clarkesville so soon," JoJo said at breakfast one morning. "I'm getting awfully fond of Chicago and this apartment. The way the sun comes into this room in the morning . . ."

Aunt Liza gave her a quizzical look. "You'll need all the time you'll have to prepare for your wedding." she said. "Besides, if you go on with your classes at some hospital back East, you'll be kept very busy."

"That reminds me—did I tell you that Doctor Gregory Fielding suggested when I was home for the holidays that I could become a nurse's aide in the First Ward Hospital?"

"And what did you tell him?"

"I didn't make any promises," said JoJo, but Aunt Liza noticed that her cheeks had turned very pink.

"That reminds me," said Aunt Liza. "There's a medical convention here in Chicago the end of February. I've invited your Doctor Fielding to stay here while he's in town. You know he interned in a Chicago hospital and was very much interested in the work of the settlement house. We're old friends. And since you two know each other . . ."

For a minute JoJo did not speak.

"What's the matter? Don't you like him?" asked Aunt Liza. "I know he's rather abrupt, but often these dedicated young men are like that. I wouldn't have invited him if I'd thought . . ."

"Oh no, we get along all right," murmured JoJo. "Don't worry about it, Aunt Liza. He'll probably ignore me, anyway. I know what he thinks about society girls."

Chapter 9

JoJo DIDN'T know whether she was glad or sorry when her aunt showed her the telegram she received from Doctor Fielding, in response to her invitation.

"THANKS A MILLION," it read, *"BUT I'VE ALREADY BOOKED MY ROOM AT ONE OF THE CONVENTION HOTELS. BE DELIGHTED TO CALL ON YOU, IF I MAY, HOWEVER. WILL PHONE."*

A few days later, on a Thursday night, Doctor Fielding phoned the apartment. JoJo knew he had been attending the convention for the last three days. In fact, the newspapers had thought enough of a speech he made on the incident of tubercular bacilli among those who were poorly nourished to give his remarks ample space on Page One. Aunt Liza had called JoJo's attention to the news story.

"He's a very bright young man," she said to JoJo, as if her niece had cast aspersions on his intellect. "If he has encouraged you to take up practical nursing, it must be because he thinks you can make the grade. He's very impatient, I hear, with either doctors or nurses who don't dedicate themselves to helping humanity."

"Aunt Liza, you sound as if you were in love with him," JoJo teased. "I admit he's bright—a genius maybe—but he's so wound up in the medical profession that I don't believe he's ever flirted with a girl or taken her dancing."

"Then it's the girl's fault," Aunt Liza defended him.

"I might even say it's your fault. Any girl knows how to wangle a date."

A few moment's later when JoJo answered the phone, she found that she did not have to wangle a date, as her aunt had put it. After a brief preliminary greeting Doctor Gregory Fielding said abruptly:

"The convention will wind up tomorrow night with a big banquet. Most of the men have brought their wives, and I'm allowed to have a guest, too. I wondered if you would like to come with me. The speeches are about over," he added, "so it won't be too dull. Perhaps Miss Devery would want to come too."

"I'll let you ask her yourself," JoJo said, a little nettled by the casual way he suggested a chaperone.

But Aunt Liza instantly developed symptoms of a cold and said at once that she could not attend the banquet on Friday. However, before JoJo could stop her, she had promised that her niece would be delighted to go. She arranged for Doctor Fielding to call at the apartment at eight o'clock and then, although JoJo was making frantic signals, she said goodbye and hung up the phone.

"You're throwing me at his head, practically," JoJo objected. "You know I'm engaged, and I think Ed would take a very dim view of my going out with another man."

"He can't object to a medical convention," Aunt Liza said placidly.

"I haven't told Ed that I'm studying practical nursing."

"He'll have to know sometime. And by the way, you ought to tell Charles, too. I don't like the idea of you having to study under my sponsorship, as it were, as if you had something to hide."

"I know," JoJo said unhappily. "I was on the verge of telling Uncle Chuck about it several times during the holidays. I don't believe he will mind in the least that I am learning something useful. But still, I want to be entirely sure how I feel about it myself."

"That's up to you, of course," Aunt Liza said at once. "Now our immediate problem is what you will wear to the convention banquet. How about the silver

frock you wore New Year's Eve? Did you bring it with you?"

JoJo told her she had not brought the silver evening dress but that she had a gay print embroidered with silver bugles that she had not worn before. She went and got the dress in question and showed it to her aunt, who remarked that the sprays of apple blossoms looked as springlike as if the snow had entirely disappeared, which it had not. JoJo was hesitant about wearing such a glamorous creation to a convention banquet, but Aunt Liza assured her that the visiting wives would be dressed to the hilt.

"As a matter of fact," Aunt Liza said thoughtfully, "I'm going to lend you my pink pearls. I'll get them out of the bank vault tomorrow."

Again JoJo had the sensation that she was being pushed into the date with Doctor Fielding. But she had to admit that she herself wanted to go. JoJo was sure that Ed would not have approved, no matter how dull he thought the party might be. Ed was, as she had occasion to know, a most possessive person, and he lived according to the rules. The Number One rule was that she should never have a date with another man now that they were engaged.

Perhaps it was the thought of doing something slightly forbidden that made her eyes sparkle more than usual as she dressed for the banquet Friday night. She had left class at the settlement house an hour early so that she could get her hair done. It was combed into a shining black cap and fastened with a jeweled pin at one side of her head. Aunt Liza had not mentioned it, but the pink pearl necklace had a matching pair of earrings. The jewel box containing the set lay open on the dressing table when JoJo went into her room. She knew how much her aunt loved the pearls and she was most appreciative of the way she had generously offered to let her niece wear them. As Aunt Liza said, they were the perfect complement to her dress.

Doctor Gregory Fielding, when he arrived, was impeccably dressed in a new tuxedo. He looked, JoJo thought, like any other young man out for an evening of fun. But his manner and expression were exactly the same as they had always been at the hospital. He

greeted JoJo as if he saw her every day. If he noticed her new evening dress, JoJo thought with wry amusement, he managed to conceal it well.

"I'm so glad you didn't bring flowers," she could not resist saying as she showed him into the living room where Aunt Liza was waiting. "The apple blossoms on my dress would make it difficult to wear a corsage."

"I never thought of flowers," Doctor Fielding said brusquely. "This banquet is more or less a routine affair. They always have a banquet at the close of the convention."

While she went to get her stole JoJo was thinking that the young doctor was certainly telling her that it was not a romantic date. He might as well have been her father, JoJo fumed, picking up her evening bag and making sure that her compact and lipstick were inside. She did not quite know how she was going to manage it, but she was firmly resolved that the cool and impersonal Doctor Fielding would be warmly attentive before the evening was over.

As Aunt Liza had predicted, the doctors' wives were brilliantly dressed and the grand ballroom of the hotel was a maze of shifting light and color. It was not like the usual social functions that Josette DeCourcy had so often attended. There was the same gay laughter and the same mingling of groups before they went into the dining room. But although many of the parties JoJo had attended had been given for five hundred persons or more, there had always been an intimate—almost a family feeling—among the guests.

Here, rubbing elbows with noted doctors and surgeons and their wives, JoJo sensed an electric undercurrent of purpose that was wholly lacking in her own social group of Clarkesville. These doctors had attended the convention, not to have a good time or to spend money in the name of charity. Instead they apparently had used the last few days to study new facts or to present their own findings before their fellow doctors. JoJo was at a loss to describe even to herself the feeling that this group seemed to generate without conscious effort. Perhaps, she thought, it was because test tubes and research equipment and new medicines were so exciting to the doctors of the present generation.

JoJo said as much as they sat down at one of the large tables where seven other doctors and their wives were seated.

"All of you act as if you had just found uranium in Colorado," JoJo said when everybody had been introduced. "You've actually created a climate of discovery at this convention."

The doctors laughed and smiled their thanks for the compliment. One of the doctors' wives, a matronly woman in a gold lamé gown, seemed to speak for all of them when she said slowly:

"It is quite obvious my dear, that you are not married to a doctor. If you were, you would know that the climate of discovery that a doctor's wife lives in is confined almost solely to finding lost shirts studs or making sure that your husband's tuxedo is ready when he dashes in five minutes before he is going somewhere to make a speech."

The other doctors appeared to agree that the lot of a doctor's wife was not an easy one. But Doctor Gregory Fielding did not seem amused. He started asking JoJo about her classes at the settlement house, and she told him about her interest in that type of work. But she was more than ever resolved that he should, for this evening at least, forget his high purpose and be just a young man out on a date.

As the toastmaster said, when he stood up, they were going to serve brief speeches with the demi-tasse. He touched lightly on the program they had followed during the meetings and then called upon the three guest speakers to make concluding remarks. He drew a general laugh when he took out a stop watch and placed it ostentatiously in front of him.

To JoJo the speakers all seemed extremely intelligent and well informed. In spite of the toastmaster's jocular reference to the lengthy discourses doctors usually gave, none of those called upon spoke for more than ten minutes. JoJo began to feel that time was running out on her, however. Doctor Fielding had shown no personal interest in her, and it seemed likely that once the banquet was over he would take her back to Aunt Liza's apartment and say good night in his usual brisk man-

ner. Well, she thought resignedly, perhaps it was for the best.

"You've never been at an affair like this before, have you?" Gregory Fielding asked suddenly in a low voice.

"I have been to dinners given by the Bar Association in Philadelphia," JoJo said, "but somehow they lacked the dramatic quality I have felt in this gathering."

"I suppose you went with Ed Talbot. I understand he is doing very well as a lawyer."

"Yes, Ed is a wonderful person," JoJo said. "I feel very humble when I think of being married to him and trying to live up to his great plans for the future. I'm not a brilliant person," she confessed with a smile, "and there are some things about the law, as there are about the field of medicine, that I cannot understand at all, even from the layman's point of view."

"You're a very beautiful layman," Gregory said with a sudden gay smile. "I've been feeling a little humble myself. It isn't often an obscure young doctor has the opportunity to escort the most beautiful woman in the world to the convention banquet."

JoJo could only stare at him in amazement. In one quick sentence he had shown her how wrong she was about his lack of interest in her as a person. He reached over now and lightly touched the star sapphire on the third finger of her left hand.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "since Ed Talbot is going to have the joy of being with you the rest of his life, he would begrudge me a few extra hours tonight?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you don't really have a chance to talk with someone at an affair of this kind. Everything you say is on the surface. I'd like to get to know you better—find out what makes you tick."

"You sound like a psychologist," JoJo said smilingly. The toastmaster had said a brief thank you to his audience and they were all getting up from the tables. "But you're quite right, Doctor Fielding. Ed doesn't approve of my going out with other men. However, he's in Washington, and I didn't think he would mind me attending this banquet."

"I could wish he did mind," Doctor Fielding said gravely. "I could wish that you would call me Gregory,

too. A doctor doesn't have much chance to forget his profession and play hooky for a whole evening."

"I suppose not," JoJo said uncertainly, "Doctor—Gregory. I think it does everybody good to get away from routine once in a while."

"You're just wonderful," Gregory Fielding said with boyish enthusiasm. "There's a quiet little place I know of not far from here. They don't have a floor show, thank goodness, so we can just sit and talk. I'll tell you the story of my life, and you can just sit and listen while I build up a few memories."

Feeling that she was starting out on a high adventure, JoJo waited while Doctor Fielding paid his respects to the dean of the convention. It was wrong, she supposed, to be thrilled at the thought of a tête-à-tête with anyone but Ed. Yet the feeling persisted and lasted through the rest of the evening.

Afterward, JoJo did not recall what they had said in detail. She knew that, in general, Gregory Fielding had said something about his work in Clarkesville and about his training in Chicago. But he seemed more interested in what her life had been and how she felt about the future.

Without meaning to, JoJo found herself pouring out her reaction against the aimless existence of a Clarkesville debutante. She told him of Uncle Chuck's kind but impersonal interest in her and how fond she was of Aunt Liza.

In fact, looking back on those few hours, JoJo decided that the quality of their companionship was underlined more by their silences than by what they had said. Gregory Fielding had a way of looking at her intently while she was speaking that made her feel extra special. She said as much, laughing, and was startled when he replied:

"You are extra, extra special to a poor struggling surgeon who has never known what it is not to worry about someone else's health or his own ability to do just the right thing up there in the operating room. As I told you, I would never have been happy outside of the medical profession. But I think tonight for the first time I have realized what I was missing."

"I've enjoyed it, too," JoJo murmured. "But I guess

you'll have to take me home now. It's almost two o'clock, and usually Ed takes me home by three."

"I wouldn't want you to break any of Ed's rules," Gregory said stiffly. "But anyway, thank you for a wonderful evening."

They rode to Aunt Liza's apartment in silence. JoJo was grateful for that. Her reference to Ed had been thoughtless and had broken the spell her escort had woven about the last few hours. For some reason she felt guilty, not at having gone out with someone other than Ed but at having enjoyed it so much. She had done nothing wrong, and she made up her mind that she would tell Ed all about it the first time she saw him. Then she could forget these stolen moments.

JoJo invited Doctor Fielding to come in when they arrived at Aunt Liza's apartment. He refused, because he had to catch an early plane back to Clarkesville.

"I'll look forward to seeing you there," he said, pressing her hand. "I dare hope that we may be working together at the hospital. . . ."

He broke off as the door was flung open and Ed Talbot stood glaring down at them. He was not much taller than Gregory Fielding, JoJo noticed, but at the moment he was standing so rigidly straight he seemed to tower over both of them. JoJo was the first to recover.

"Ed, I didn't expect you to fly up from Washington tonight."

"That's quite obvious."

There was no mistaking the hostility of his tone. Gregory Fielding looked at him and shrugged. "I'll have to be running along. Thanks again, Miss DeCourcy, for a memorable evening."

He left quickly, and Ed opened the door wide so she could come in. It was, JoJo thought grimly, like being asked to step up to the witness box.

Chapter 10

"IF I'D KNOWN you were waiting . . ."

JoJo led the way into the living room and turned to smile at Ed.

"I got here at eleven-thirty," he said tight-lipped. "If I could have reached you by phone I would have called you."

"Didn't Aunt Liza tell you where I had gone?"

"She said you had gone to a banquet at the doctors' conference with Doctor Fielding. So after I had waited till nearly one o'clock, I called the hotel. But that didn't help. They said the banquet had been over nearly an hour ago, and everybody had left. So I stayed, expecting you home any minute." He glanced at the clock over the fireplace. "I've had quite a wait. You've been having fun, I suppose?"

"Are you giving me the third degree, Ed?" JoJo's gray eyes met Ed's blue ones unflinchingly.

"Not at all. I am just wondering—as your fiancé—what a comparative stranger like Doctor Fielding was offering you by way of entertainment for almost three hours after midnight."

JoJo flushed. "Honestly, Ed, you sound downright suspicious."

"Why shouldn't I be suspicious?" Ed interrupted her. "After all, when a girl sneaks off to Chicago and signs up for a course without letting any of her family or her friends, to say nothing of her fiancé, know what she is doing, she is certainly acting in a very irregular way."

"I've been taking a course in practical nursing at Aunt Liza's settlement house. She started the program herself. She told you all that, didn't she?"

Ed moved his hand, waving away her statement as of scant importance. "Anyway, it was sneaky to go about it on the sly. And then you have this Doctor Fielding coming out here visiting you with never a word to me about him, for all the letters you've been writing."

"Doctor Fielding came to Chicago to attend the conference."

"And this is the first time he's seen you here, I suppose."

"As a matter of fact it, it is. He's an old friend of Aunt Liza's."

"What difference does that make? He didn't take Aunt Liza to the banquet, I notice."

"You haven't any right to talk to me like this, Ed Talbot." JoJo's voice broke a little. Don't cry, she thought to herself fiercely. Don't let him see you crying. To cover her frantic effort to control her tears, she walked across to a divan and sat down, her flowered skirt a bright contrast to the dull green of the upholstery. Ed stalked around a tall chair and leaned his arms along its back. The pose reminded JoJo vaguely of a courtroom and a prosecuting attorney leaning on one of those desks, or whatever they were, that looked as if they were on stilts. The light from a wall bracket shone on his fair head, and JoJo wished suddenly that he would come over and sit beside her; put his arms around her and say that he hadn't meant to hurt her. But Ed's next words brought all her resentment rushing back.

"Doctor Fielding would hardly have asked you to this shindig of his if he hadn't been seeing you since you ran down that old man."

"Since I . . ." JoJo's indignation choked her.

"Oh well, we, then. We were both responsible. Neither of us had our minds on the road."

That was true enough. She and Ed had been engrossed in each other that snowy night on the way home. There hadn't been anyone on the road, and then the old man had darted out. Still, there was a basic unfairness in the way Ed was including her in the blame

for the accident, pretending that her generous acceptance of the role of driver at the time had been not a mere gesture on her part, but the actual fact. JoJo saw again the crumpled form beside the road as she and Ed bent over the injured man.

Then, realizing that she had been sidetracked, she returned to Ed's gibe about Doctor Fielding having been seeing her since the accident.

"What if Doctor Fielding has been seeing me?" she demanded.

"Just this: I suspect it was his idea that you take up nursing in Chicago, deceiving me so that I wouldn't know what was going on!"

"It was convenient to study at Aunt Liza's settlement house," said JoJo, keeping her voice level. "After we made such dreadful mistakes while trying to help that old man, I wanted to learn something about first aid and what to do in the kind of emergencies that people sometimes have to face."

"And I suppose the Red Cross or Civil Defense classes you could have found nearer home wouldn't do?"

"I wanted to learn more than those classes could give me."

"Why, when we're to be married in June? As my wife, I doubt if you'd find it necessary to work in a hospital."

JoJo twisted the sapphire ring round and round on her finger. She was tempted to pull it off and hand it back to Ed. But she controlled the anger that swept over her.

"Practical nurses can be useful in all sorts of ways," she managed to say. "They work in private homes, especially where there are cases of chronic illness, and as assistants in doctors' offices."

"Has Doctor Gregory Fielding promised you a job in his office?"

"Don't be like that, Ed," JoJo implored, "and don't talk so loud. You'll wake Aunt Liza. Did she invite you to stay here tonight?"

"You needn't be sarcastic about my staying so late," retorted Ed. "After all, it's your fault that I'm here till this hour. I've been busy with a client all evening and

rushed over here to have a visit with you before my plane leaves—very soon now. I needn't have rushed, I know now." His tone was bitter.

"I wouldn't have found out about you and Doctor Fielding if you'd been here when I called. You would have been able to keep your little secrets, including the fact that you have gone to such lengths to keep in touch with Fielding as to take up the study of nursing. You could have kept Aunt Liza from spilling the story, if you'd been here to hush her up."

"You're very unfair," retorted JoJo hotly. "I was going to surprise you when my three months' training was finished. . . ." To her horror she burst into tears, but they were tears of fury.

"Never mind the weeping act," said Ed. "I'm leaving now. Save your tears for when your guardian orders you to come home, which he will, I'm certain, when he hears what you and Doctor Fielding are up to." His hand was on the knob of the door leading to the hall. "Never mind seeing me out. I can find my own way, and I'll shut the door carefully and not wake your aunt."

JoJo stayed where she was as Ed picked up his overcoat and attaché case in the hall and went out the front door softly, as he had promised. When she heard the slight click of the spring lock, she jumped up and ran after him, opening the front door just in time to see him stepping into a cab. He had not stopped to put on his coat, but was carrying it over his arm. For a moment JoJo stood framed in the lighted doorway, a lonely little figure with the wind blowing her skirt so that it outlined her long, slim legs. But Ed did not look back. The taxi door slammed and the motor roared.

JoJo turned back into the house. Of course there'd be a taxi right there, she thought as she switched off the downstairs lights. Everything happens just so for Ed Talbot.

At her aunt's door, she hesitated just a second. It would be a relief to talk the situation over with Aunt Liza, if she were awake. But there was no sound within the room, and JoJo moved on to her own little suite. She undressed mechanically, washed the tear stains from her face and opened the window before slipping

between the silk sheets that were one of Aunt Liza's luxuries.

She did not fall asleep immediately, her thoughts churning in such confusion that she could not compose herself or even shut her eyes, but lay staring into the darkness, going over the pleasant hours spent with Doctor Fielding, the disturbing scene with Ed Talbot and finally switching to Uncle Chuck and his possible reaction when Ed went to him with his story of her deceit.

Would Uncle Chuck demand her immediate return? Her thoughts ran on chaotically. Such a short time remained before she would be going home anyway. It depended, she supposed, on what Ed said. He might present her guardian with an unsettling account of her activities that would leave Uncle Chuck with no alternative but to recall her at once.

Mixed with her resentment over Ed's attitude, the warm glow around her heart when she recalled snatches of the talk between the friendly silences while she was with Doctor Fielding, and her worry over her guardian's course of action, JoJo was conscious of a feeling of guilt which she could not quite smother. In a way, Ed was right. She should have let him know her plan to study practical nursing.

Why had she concealed it from her fiancé? Honesty forced her to admit to herself that it was because he would have ridiculed her decision, so that she would not have had the courage to go on with her plan, if indeed he had not forbidden her to enroll for the course. She wanted her training to be an accomplished fact before Ed learned about it.

Suddenly she sat up in bed. I'm not going to drop out of training, she said to herself with such intensity that she thought for a moment that she was speaking aloud. I'll take Doctor Fielding's offer and become a nurse's aide in the First Ward Hospital as soon as I get home. She dropped back on the pillow and was immediately fast asleep.

Uncle Chuck had not come to meet her plane. At first when she reached the familiar airport JoJo could not believe it. She looked around uncertainly before she caught sight of her guardian's car. The chauffeur

jumped out to help her with her bag, and JoJo glanced into the car and saw that it was empty.

So Uncle Chuck was furious with her, as Ed had hoped he would be. In response to the chauffeur's question, she explained that her trunks were coming by train and surrendered her baggage checks.

"Is Uncle Chuck out of town?" she asked, trying to keep her voice steady.

"He's been having a bit of a stomach upset, Miss Josette," the man explained. "He said you were not to worry, that he'd be up to greet you when you got home, but he hadn't felt quite up to the long ride."

Uncle Chuck ill! JoJo could not remember when her guardian had ever been sick. She got into the car, sitting in the front seat beside the chauffeur, hoping to get some details of the illness, but apparently the man had no further information to give.

At home she found Charles Overton poring over his stamp collection. She kissed him on top of his head, then flung her arms around his neck.

"You darling old fraud! You're not sick at all!" she cried. "Not if the doctor lets you up like this."

"Doctor! Who needs a doctor?" demanded Uncle Chuck. "Something I ate disagreed with me last night and I was sick for a while. But Matilda gave me her favorite remedy—some kind of laxative—and as you see I'm up and around today. I wanted to meet you, but . . ." His voice trailed off. "Anyway, I'm all right now and I'll be having dinner with you pretty soon. Run and take your things off. Did you have an easy trip?"

"It was all right. But it gave me a jolt when I heard you were sick," JoJo said, eyeing him worriedly.

"Now don't you go borrowing trouble. I'm all right, I tell you. Stop looking like that. Let's see you smile. Oh, you can do better than that—show your pretty teeth," Uncle Chuck said, and JoJo smiled obediently and blew him a kiss from the doorway, as she turned to go upstairs.

At dinner nothing was said about JoJo's practical nurse studies. Perhaps Ed Talbot had said nothing to Uncle Chuck about what he called her deception. JoJo kept off the subject, regaling her guardian instead with

an account of her aunt's activities in the settlement house and her own evening at the doctors' conference banquet.

After dinner Charles Overton retired to his room and JoJo carried the mail that had come for her upstairs, noting as she went up that one of the letters was from Ed. She had not heard from him since the night of their quarrel, and she stared at the envelope apprehensively before opening it.

Ed's letter was brief and noncommittal about his feelings. He had been forced to go to London on an important matter. He was sorry he could not be home when she arrived from Chicago, since they had so much to discuss. He would let her know when he was returning, and he hoped she would have learned enough about practical nursing by that time to drop the subject and devote herself to preparation for their wedding. He was ready to forget her extraordinary conduct, and she was to be assured of his continued love.

A letter like this should have been written on legal paper, JoJo fumed, with whereases and in pursuances of and other legal mumbo-jumbo scattered through it.

Still, Ed had said he loved her. She took what comfort she could from the thought. Only she wished he could have told her so in person, and she wished, too, that he had not been so coldly forgiving about her Chicago project. After all, it wasn't exactly a misdemeanor to try to make herself useful to others. Certainly Doctor Fielding, though he had scoffed at her hope of becoming a practical nurse when she had first broached the subject, was now taking her seriously enough to offer her a job as a nurse's aide in his hospital. But how would she ever get Ed to agree to her working even part time in the First Ward Hospital? From the tone of his letter, he was as determined as ever to dictate her every action.

Shaking off her depression over the situation, JoJo went to say good night to her guardian. She found him sitting up in bed, his face very pale and his forehead wet with perspiration.

"Uncle Chuck! You're sick again." JoJo seized his wrist and began to count his pulse. As she did so, Charles winced slightly.

"Nothing to worry about," he managed to say. "I guess I should have left those string beans alone at dinner. String beans never did agree with me, but I like 'em." He winced again, this time bending almost double.

"Just a cramp," he said as he straightened up. "Matilda is bringing me something. I'll be all right."

JoJo put his hand gently back on the bedcover and went to the telephone. She was asking Information for the First Ward Hospital when Matilda came in with a bottle and spoon and a heating pad.

"Matilda! Don't give him anything!" she cried. "And take that heating pad away."

"But," began Matilda, "he's got a stomachache."

"Leave him alone! Don't give him a thing!" JoJo repeated, as the operator gave her the hospital number and she began to dial with one hand, waving Matilda away with the other. She asked for Doctor Fielding and, when she learned he was not at the hospital, told the girl at the switchboard it was an emergency and got his home telephone number.

"You're making a big fuss over nothing," protested Uncle Chuck. "I shouldn't have eaten those string beans."

But JoJo, now talking to Doctor Fielding on the telephone, paid no attention to him.

"I'll send an ambulance," the doctor was telling JoJo. "Keep him quiet; don't let him get up or swallow anything."

In spite of himself, Uncle Chuck was moaning as the ambulance arrived. JoJo, taking time only to snatch up a coat and her handbag, followed the stretcher with its blanket-wrapped figure and was allowed to ride beside him in the ambulance.

From what JoJo had told him on the telephone, Doctor Fielding suspected that Charles Overton was suffering from possible acute appendicitis. Examination proved his diagnosis correct, and arrangements were made for an immediate operation.

JoJo insisted on remaining in the hospital waiting room. After what seemed an endless time, Doctor Fielding came to tell her that the operation had been successful.

"But there was no time to lose," he added, explaining that the appendix had been about to rupture when it was removed. "Your guardian can thank you for probably saving his life or at least a long illness."

JoJo called home to announce the good news and asked to have the chauffeur bring her car. She rode all the way to the house in a glow of satisfaction, feeling that she had justified her practical nursing course by recognizing the seriousness of Uncle Chuck's condition.

When Uncle Chuck was able to talk, later, he told her so too.

"I knew all along what you were up to in Chicago," he said. "Liza told me when she was here at Christmas. So when Ed Talbot came bursting in one day, indignant over the way I had been deceived, I laughed in his face."

"And you don't disapprove?" asked JoJo eagerly.

"Of having my life saved?" Charles Overton grinned. "Doctor Fielding gives you full credit for that, you know, and I'm willing to take his word for it. He's proud of you—almost as proud as I am. Ed Talbot," he aded, "doesn't know his luck."

Chapter 11

THE FIRST WARD Hospital was a buff-colored, modern structure with a short, shrub-bordered cement walk leading to the street at the front and circling the building. At one side was the parking lot, a graveled area from which the walk could be followed around to the front door. In two weeks the whole section had become familiar to JoJo.

She had arranged with Doctor Fielding and the superintendent of nurses, to whom he had referred her, to serve on the afternoon shift three days a week. When and where she would resume instruction classes, or even if she would actually do so, she had not yet decided. There was her marriage to Ed Talbot to be considered, and she felt vaguely that after the wedding she might postpone the whole course of study until some time later, depending to a large extent on Ed's plans. She also cherished a faint hope that she might get Ed to agree to postpone the wedding itself until the autumn.

Meanwhile, after two weeks as a nurse's aide, she was more interested in nursing than ever before. She loved the pink and white candy-striped uniform, she liked the student nurses she had become friendly with and, although she stood in awe of them, she admired the registered nurses.

She saw Doctor Fielding nearly every day. Their meeting place was the Children's Ward. There were several surgical cases: mostly children recovering from tonsillectomies or similar minor operations. But there

was one youngster of seven whose arm had been amputated following a street accident.

Manuel had been a problem ever since he had come to the hospital. His great, tragic dark eyes blazed with fury as often as not, and he was given to fits of screaming rage, triggered by almost any incident that occurred in the course of ordinary hospital routine. He screamed if another patient so much as touched one of the toys the nurses and doctors brought him. He screamed when a nurse tried to give him his medicine, and frequently, after a nurse had finished making his bed, he tore it apart, using his one hand and both his feet.

JoJo was attracted at once to the pitiful little boy. I'd be mad at the world, too, if I had lost an arm, she thought, and set herself to help the child make some kind of adjustment to his situation. Her first efforts met with no success.

"That's a good-looking rooster," she said conversationally, approaching the bed where Manuel was sitting up, surrounded by toys.

"I suppose you wind it up and it struts around the room," she went on, and would have bitten back the words if she could. Manuel, with his one hand, would hardly be able to hold the rooster and wind it up at the same time. She felt she got the response she deserved when Manuel seized the toy with his one hand and threw it straight at her face. His aim was poor, luckily, and it glanced harmlessly off her shoulder.

"Of course you have only one hand right now, though the doctor tells me you'll have a brand-new arm pretty soon, when they finish making you one that fits. But meanwhile, if I had only one hand, do you know how I'd wind up a rooster like yours?" She picked up the toy from the floor where it had fallen.

Manuel said nothing, though he watched her attentively.

"I'd just hold the rooster upside down like this," said JoJo, making a big project of it. "Then I'd catch it between my knees, like this." The candy-striped uniform was short, but JoJo pulled the skirt a little higher, so that Manuel could see her knees clutching the upside-down toy. "I'd hold it real fast, so it couldn't move,

and then I'd wind it as hard as I could—see? One, two, three, round and round the winder goes; round and round and round."

Becoming conscious of another pair of eyes besides Manuel's, JoJo glanced up and met the gaze of Doctor Fielding. Her cheeks as pink as the stripes in her dress, she stood up, shaking down her skirt.

"I was just trying to show Manuel how he could use one hand . . ." she began.

"And a pair of knees, to make up for a missing hand," said the doctor. "A very nice demonstration," he added gravely. "I hope Manuel appreciated it as much as I did."

For a second JoJo stood in silent confusion; then she caught the gleam of laughter in Doctor Fielding's eyes. She smiled, the doctor smiled broadly in return, and Manuel, suddenly caught up in the spirit of the occasion, gave a little crow of laughter himself.

"You've done something none of us have been able to do since Manuel arrived," said Doctor Fielding. "You've actually made him laugh. From now on, you're assigned to Manuel's case every day between two and two-thirty. You're to come here and make him happy."

At first JoJo wondered why the doctor had selected that particular time for her visit with Manuel. Then, as she noticed that Doctor Gregory, as the other student nurses called him in private, was almost always in the Children's Ward at that time, she spoke to a young student who had become chummy with her. Did the doctor make a habit of visiting the Children's Ward at that time?

"Oh yes," said the girl, "except of course when he's busy somewhere else, operating or something. Why do you want to know?"

"No reason," said JoJo. "I'm just trying to familiarize myself with the hospital routine." But that wasn't the real answer. Doctor Fielding had asked her to visit Manuel at the same time he was in the Children's Ward, she realized, and she felt a little thrill of happiness that Doctor Gregory had deliberately arranged for her to be in the ward at the time he made his call.

It was with mixed feelings that Josette received the

cable announcing Ed Talbot's return from London. She was facing a showdown, she knew. Either she would have to convince Ed that there was no actual conflict between her love for him and her desire to continue her nursing studies, or she would have to choose between her two loves.

It's silly for Ed to be disturbed about my wanting to be useful, she told herself. It's little enough for anybody to do, especially for a girl who isn't even trying to take someone else's job away. There are never enough nurses to meet the need, and if I can be of help in an emergency, or around a hospital, I really think Ed should be happy about it.

Ed Talbot had to stop off at Washington before coming home, but he planned to be in Clarkesville on Friday. He did not say what time on Friday, and JoJo was undecided whether or not to take her regular shift on Friday afternoon at the hospital. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were her days on duty, and she hated to miss her regular half-day, since she had no way of telling when Ed would arrive. She had looked for a telegram giving her more information. When it had not come by the time she was ready to start on Friday, she left a message with Charles Overton, who was now at home, and went on her way.

"I'll tell Ed you're at the First Ward Hospital, as you asked me to do," said Uncle Chuck. "I'll also tell him he'd better like it, because if it hadn't been for that training of yours I probably wouldn't be here to answer the phone."

"Oh, I think Ed will take it in stride now," said JoJo. "I think he was just putting on an act because I hadn't told him my plans. 'Deceived' is the word he used. I don't think he really holds it against me that I want to do something to justify my life."

"Don't underestimate the fury of a stuffed shirt," said Uncle Chuck, but so low that JoJo could not hear what he said.

"What did you say, darling?" she asked, buttoning her plaid topcoat and turning at the door.

"Nothing important. Run along or you'll be late," said Uncle Chuck. "Remember me to Doctor Fielding if you see him."

It was in the happy anticipation of meeting Doctor Fielding and relaying her guardian's words—she so seldom had an excuse to say more than hello to him, unless he started the conversation himself—that JoJo drove rapidly to the hospital and parked her car expertly in the parking space. She turned the key in the ignition, dropped the car keys in her handbag and had started along the concrete walk to the front door before, as she turned the corner, she looked back at the sound of another car door being slammed, just in time to see Doctor Fielding lift his arm in a smiling salute to a girl behind the wheel of the car he had just left.

"Be ready at five-thirty," she heard the girl call after him, and hastened her steps till she was practically running. Thus she was through the front door before Doctor Greg bounded up the shallow steps. But he overtook her in the corridor.

"Hi!" he sang out, his tone gayer than JoJo ever heard it.

"Good afternoon," she managed, but he passed her so fast she doubted if he had even heard her reply.

It was the first time she had ever seen him with a girl, except of course a nurse. Then a devastating thought struck her. Maybe the girl was his wife! In the fleeting glimpse she had had of her, JoJo had caught the sparkle of red hair as the sunlight struck it and had had a general impression of prettiness.

As if the day's start had not been miserable enough, JoJo was doomed to further disappointment when Doctor Greg failed to show up in the Children's Ward at the usual time. By then she had planned several clever ways by which she could trap the doctor into revealing his marital status. She could, for instance, say: "Mrs. Fielding has the loveliest red hair I ever saw. I caught a glimpse of it when she drove you to the hospital today."

When the time for her to leave the Children's Ward arrived, and she had not yet seen the Doctor, JoJo, who could contain herself no longer, said casually to a student nurse who was walking with her toward the cafeteria, "Doctor Fielding adores children, doesn't he? I love to watch him with them in the Children's Ward. Has he any of his own?"

"Doctor Fielding?" The other girl spoke absently, her eyes on a scribbled page of the notebook she had taken from her pocket. "Oh, he's not married, though how he has managed to escape with all the women chasing him the way they do . . . See you honey, I turn off here."

Not married! Well, that was something. But engaged perhaps? He had had a very warm smile for the girl in the car. Not that it was any of her affair, of course. JoJo was not particularly cheered by this thought as she went into the cafeteria. She wasn't hungry, either, she realized, as she ordered strawberry jello and a glass of milk.

Ten minutes later she was listlessly sipping her milk and toying with the jello—maybe she should have broken her own rule and had them top it with whipped cream—when she was called to the telephone.

"Josette? It's me, sweet."

Ed's voice. So he wasn't angry after all. She should have felt relieved, JoJo knew, but at that moment she seemed to feel nothing at all. Uncle Chuck had told him where to find her and he wanted to call her at the first possible moment. How about dinner at the country club? He'd call up and order something special, and she could meet him for a grand reunion.

That was what Ed called it, as if he'd been away a year. . . .

She needn't be so critical when Ed was evidently going to let bygones be bygones, even withdraw his objections to her practical nursing project, JoJo chided herself. What was the matter with her, anyway? She went up to the nurses' lounge, determined to take extra pains with her looks. There wasn't time to go home and change, but as she took off her rumpled uniform she reflected that the white wool dress she had worn that morning under her plaid coat was an attractive dinner outfit. She took the pins out of her hair and combed it softly back from her face. No, Ed liked it best with a center part. So she parted it and let it swing forward toward her cheeks. A touch of lipstick—Ed was conservative about makeup—and she was ready. She took her engagement ring out of

her handbag, where she kept it while on duty, and slipped it back on her finger.

Before she was out of her car at the country club, Ed was beside it, opening the door for her and smothering her with kisses. Ed had never been effusive; JoJo tried to meet his enthusiasm now with equal ardor, but she didn't feel quite at ease. Ed's manner on the telephone had prepared her for an affectionate greeting, but wasn't Ed overdoing it? After all, they had quarreled at their last meeting; Ed's ignoring of the whole episode was slightly insulting. It was as if he felt he were dealing with a child or a moron and the quarrel therefore had been simply a trivial matter, something best ignored by a mature man who could afford to be indulgent toward a little feather-brain like herself. She was rather silent as they sat down at the dinner table.

Ed had heard about Charles Overton's operation.

"He seemed so well before I left, just a little while ago," he remarked. "I suppose the operation was necessary. No doubt Doctor Fielding knew what he was doing. However, I read an article a couple of months ago that said a large percentage of operations nowadays are not necessary. Doctors are just looking for the experience or for fees . . ." He broke off at JoJo's look of outrage.

"I don't mean that I suspect Doctor Fielding of any such practices," Ed added hastily. "I was just reminded of something I read."

"Tell me about your London trip." JoJo controlled her resentment with an effort. "Was it successful?"

Evidently Ed felt that he had gone too far in his implied criticism of Doctor Fielding. He plunged into a detailed account of his difficulties in locating witnesses he wanted for a client's case, and gave an excellent account of himself as a hard-working lawyer who would win a case regardless of the cost to himself in time and effort. He was, he observed, a dedicated lawyer.

"Doctors and nurses are often dedicated workers, too," ventured JoJo.

"I suppose so," said Ed indifferently. The steaks he had ordered had arrived, and he cut a neat triangle out of the center of his before he went on, smiling as if a

sudden amusing thought had occurred to him:

"You don't really consider yourself a dedicated nurse, do you darling? I can't see you running from bedside to bedside with a thermometer for the rest of your life."

JoJo raised her eyes and gave him a long, level look.

"Are you trying to laugh me out of my project?"

"Wouldn't dream of it," said Ed flippantly. "I know better than to try to stop a woman whose mind is made up." He grinned at her, his old disarming grin, but JoJo did not smile in return. He was merely humoring her, belittling her earnest effort to become a community asset, however slight, instead if a social nonentity.

Ed was determined not to take her seriously. Very well, she would go along with that. Summoning all her training in the social graces, she resolutely changed the subject once more and this time kept the conversation on an impersonal plane. But their basic cause of dissension was by no means dissipated, JoJo realized. This was only an intermission in their quarrel; nothing had been settled.

Chapter 12

JoJo and Ed were caught up in a whirl of activities over the weekend. There was a picnic on Saturday, everybody hiking through the woods to a spot which the crowd had favored for picnics since school days. It was a boulder-strewn space beside a small waterfall, and it offered a natural fireplace formed by several huge rocks. At night "everybody," which in Clarkesville meant JoJo and Ed and their contemporaries, along with the older society folks, attended a movie première in Philadelphia, which was being given for the benefit of a local welfare organization.

There had been practically no time in which JoJo and Ed were alone together. Even on the ride home they had to take Flip Talbot and her escort in their car, Flip's car having developed trouble that would keep it in a Philadelphia garage overnight.

Nothing had been planned for Sunday, but JoJo expected Ed to call and suggest that in the evening they attend a concert at the Town Hall at which a girl they knew was to make her singing debut. She was a recent "discovery" who had left Clarkesville to study a few years before and, though she was not a close friend of JoJo or her friends, she was by way of being the town's only current celebrity and it was generally felt that she deserved the support of the young society crowd.

Ed called early Sunday with exciting news.

"Flip has run away with Eduardo," he said in a strained voice.

"But we all got home so late. They didn't say anything." JoJo's words sounded foolish in her own ears. Evidently Ed thought they were, too.

"Of course not. People planning to elope don't usually take their relatives into their confidence," Ed said impatiently. "They must have stolen off together almost as soon as we got home. Flip took my car, too," Ed went on, aggrieved. "She phoned a while ago and told me where she had left it. She was vague about details, but I gathered they were going to Maryland to get married. Mother has collapsed."

"Would it help if I came over to talk to her?" asked JoJo.

"Well, she has always liked you. I don't suppose it will help much—but yes, come along. I have a conference, though."

Reflecting that Flip, who was always trying to shock people, might have been expected to do something sensational such as eloping with a young man who was an enigma as far as her family and friends were concerned, JoJo drove hurriedly over to the Talbots' estate, appreciating, as she did whenever she saw it, the charming mellowed white brick house surrounded by well-groomed greenery. The lawn on either side of the driveway was starred with white and gold crocuses, and she was reminded that a white and gold color scheme marked the Talbot grounds and garden throughout the spring and summer and well into the autumn. The white wisteria that hung like lace over one side of the house would soon be in bloom; the daffodils that edged a pool behind the house would have their turn before the gold-centered white water lilies took over in midsummer.

"Mother never liked the count," said Ed as he and JoJo went upstairs to Mrs. Talbot's sitting room.

"The count?"

"That's what he claims to be."

The door to his mother's room was open, but he tapped lightly on the panel as they went in. Mrs. Talbot was lying on a chaise longue. But instead of looking woebegone, as JoJo expected, the older woman was clearly furious.

"I asked Edward to follow them and bring Sara

home," she told JoJo, sitting up straight and throwing an angry look at Ed.

"Now, Mother, be reasonable. We don't even know where they were going yet. It would take the FBI, or at least the police, to find them."

"You could at least notify the Bureau of Missing Persons," Mrs. Talbot persisted.

"There's nothing we can do," said Ed patiently. "They may be married by now, anyway."

"Very well, if you are content to see your sister dragged off to some musty old castle where there's no water and nothing to eat but olives. I must say I'm surprised, very surprised." Mrs. Talbot hurled herself back against the cushions and closed her eyes.

"Now, Mother . . ."

"Don't 'Now Mother' me." Suddenly she opened her eyes and sat up straight.

"Josette!" She spoke to JoJo for the first time. "How is it that Sara didn't tell you she was running off?" she demanded. "Or did she?"

"Oh no! I never dreamed of such a thing," protested the girl.

"A pity. You might have talked some sense into her, you being a nurse and all." Mrs. Talbot lay back and closed her eyes again.

"You two might as well run along," she said. "If you're just going to stand around, you can go stand somewhere else."

"What did your mother mean about Flip being dragged off to a castle?" JoJo asked Ed as they went downstairs to the terrace.

"Oh, Eduardo claims to be a count, with ancestral estates somewhere along the northern border of Italy," Ed explained. "The place hasn't been kept up—not modernized anyway—and as I understand it the count's family is mainly distinguished for its lack of money. Flip doesn't inherit her money until she is twenty-one. If her romantic young man doesn't get himself a job . . ." He left the thought in mid-air.

"Maybe your mother will become reconciled. She always laughed at Flip's escapades; I can't see her refusing to forgive her for eloping with this Eduardo."

"We can hope," said Ed.

A car had driven up to the front door. "My conference in person," he murmured.

"Go meet him," JoJo told him. "Never mind seeing me to my car."

Ed kissed her briefly. "I'll be around at eight."

JoJo had the house to herself when she got home. Matilda had been given the afternoon and evening off, but she had left everything in readiness for tonight's "late late snack," as JoJo called the after-concert scrambled eggs, bacon and coffee she had planned for the casual get-together of her friends in honor of the singer, Caroline Carroll. Charles Overton was spending the weekend out of town, and Celia always had Sundays off.

JoJo got out her notebooks, which she had filled while studying at Aunt Liza's settlement house, and began typing her notes and arranging them for ready reference. She was surprised at the amount of material she had collected.

Did Ed Talbot really expect her to put aside all her painstaking work—forget the whole project—when they were married?

I do wish I could go on and get my license, she thought. I could earn it by the end of the year, and with Ed away all day at his office or in court, I don't see why he should mind if I spent my spare time learning something useful.

Probably she could make him see it her way if she went about it right, she decided. I'd want to give some time as a nurse's aide at the First Ward Hospital too, she told herself. For the first time in my life I feel as if I belonged someplace.

She was hardly settled in the car beside Ed that night before he turned to her with a broad grin.

"Flip's back," he said.

"With her new husband?"

"No, she decided not to marry him. She thought it over—on the train—and decided that her feeling for Eduardo was not love. It seems he fell asleep, sitting

there beside her, and, in her own words, she 'saw at once that it wasn't real love on his part either, if he could fall asleep on his way to his own wedding'."

"But they didn't get home until around dawn and left again at once, on the way to Maryland, according to Flip's telephone call to you. Poor Eduardo must have been dead on his feet. I should think Flip would have been, too," said JoJo.

"Oh, you know Flip. She can go on indefinitely. Anyway, I doubt if she ever seriously meant to marry Eduardo. It probably was just another one of her show-off tricks. She figured on making a sensation, like appearing with purple hair or going to a party a few weeks ago in imitation leopard skin leotards. That happened while you were in Chicago, but I suppose you heard about it."

JoJo laughed. "I heard all right. Every girl in town wrote me about it."

"Well, that's Flip. Now that her elopement is off, nothing will ever convince me that she intended to go on with it."

The concert was a great success. The stage was banked with flowers, many of them huge bouquets sent by the large industrial and commercial firms represented by various Clarkesville citizens.

"They're proud of their talented native daughter," Ed said during the intermission, when JoJo showed astonishment at the names on some of the cards. "Most of these people don't know Caroline Carroll at all, but they think it adds luster to the name of Clarkesville that it's the home of a famous singer."

When the concert was over and the crowd was moving toward the wide open doors, JoJo found herself beside Doctor Gregory Fielding. He was talking to a girl on his other side and had not noticed JoJo.

"Doctor Livingston, I presume," she murmured.

He whirled toward her. "Well, if it isn't Stanley!" he cried, entering into the spirit of the joke. It was a mood in which she had never seen him. He and Ed nodded at each other, and as soon as they were on the sidewalk JoJo got a look at the other girl. It was the

redhead she had seen driving the doctor's car. The girl was even more beautiful than she had thought, now that she got a good look at her. JoJo's heart gave a distinct lurch. As if it mattered that Doctor Fielding and this gorgeous girl . . .

But before she finished the thought she heard the doctor saying:

"My sister Anne has been visiting me for a few days. I've been telling her about you, Josette."

He introduced his sister as Mrs. Tracy Cummins, of Boston, who was spending time with him while her husband was in Washington on business. The word "sister" was about all JoJo got out of this explanation; she suddenly felt light-headed with happiness.

"I'm having a few friends in for scrambled eggs and coffee," she said. "It's a kind of welcome home to Caroline Carroll, who has promised to drop by for a few minutes. We'd love to have you and Mrs. Cummins join us, Doctor Fielding." She turned to look at Ed, as if expecting him to second the invitation.

"Yes, do come along," said Ed. But his tone was none too cordial.

As she and Ed drove back to the house, JoJo noticed his silence. He probably disliked having Doctor Fielding included in the little intimate group of their close friends.

"I really had to ask Doctor Fielding, with his sister here and all," she ventured in a placating tone. "It would have seemed like an obvious slight to leave them out."

"It's your party," said Ed shortly.

Everybody agreed, as they finished the scrambled eggs and bacon after the guest of honor had departed to catch a plane for California, that Caroline Carroll was charming, that her voice was tops and that the records she was about to make would put her among the important singers of the day.

JoJo noticed that although his sister mingled easily with the crowd, Doctor Fielding appeared to be out of place. She saw him sitting alone in Charles Overton's den, looking through his stamp albums.

"Won't you help me pick out some records to put on the hi-fi?" she asked.

"I think you know more about records than I do," said Greg, smiling up at her. "Still, perhaps I ought to broaden my own knowlege a bit."

But JoJo discovered that the doctor had minimized his acquaintance with current records. They were soon having a lively discussion about the comparative merits of one singer over another and one orchestra over another. They became so engrossed in telling each other their preferences not only in modern music but also in popular songs of the past that they did not notice that the party was gradually thinning out. It was true that JoJo occasionally called, "Bye now!" in answer to someone's good night, but she wasn't aware that the farewells had become very frequent until Ed came to stand over Doctor Fielding and herself. She was sitting on a floor cushion, the doctor on the floor at her feet.

"Naomi Delafield wanted to say good night, but she said she could see you were in the midst of a doctor-nurse conference and so she wouldn't interrupt," said Ed.

JoJo jumped to her feet, as did Doctor Fielding.

"Never mind. She and Perry have already left," said Ed.

"I'll go collect Anne and be on my way, too," said Doctor Fielding. "Oh, there she is! Hi, Anne!"

Those who still remained were gathering their belongings and laughing and talking, drifting toward the front door.

"I think everybody had a good time," JoJo remarked to Ed as the last of the guests departed.

"I'm sure Doctor Fielding did," retorted Ed. "You certainly went out of your way to make him happy. Was that a chance meeting at the concert, or did you and the doctor have it all planned?"

"Ed! If you're going to take that attitude with me, maybe you'd better call it an evening, too."

"Don't worry. I'm practically on my way. Evidently you're not in the mood to put any effort into trying to please *me*."

"I had an idea I pleased you without making an effort. I think it would be a miserable way to start married life to be forever worrying about whether I pleased

you or not, instead of just being myself." JoJo went into the kitchen and began turning off lights.

"Speaking of married life, is there any reason we have to put off our wedding until June? You told me you'd marry me, but you didn't say why you were putting it off for nearly six months. Does that mean you're waiting to find out if there are any better offers?" Ed had followed her into the kitchen.

"You know very well I wanted to take a practical nursing course."

"Well, you've had your course. Now you're just hanging around that hospital of Doctor Fielding's, for what reason I can't imagine, unless it has something to do with the great doctor's charm."

"I don't know whether you mean to be insulting, but you are, Ed Talbot."

"If I'm not right, prove it. Marry me before the end of April. That ought to give you time to get the veil and the pearl-embroidered dress or whatever high society brides are favoring this year. Notice I'm not asking you to get married right away, without waiting for any of the usual folderol. I'm as tenderly considerate as a doctor."

JoJo had already begun to slip the sapphire ring off her finger when they heard Charles Overton's voice, following the slam of the front door.

"Where's everybody? The lights are going full blast out here, and the place is as empty as a ghost ship. Oh, there you are!" He caught JoJo in a hug as she and Ed appeared from the kitchen. "Party all over?"

"Yes, but I can give you a cup of coffee, Uncle Chuck. I'm sorry you didn't get back earlier. I'm afraid all the eggs are gone."

"Hello, Ed," said Uncle Chuck. "Thanks, JoJo, but I'm not hungry. I know your friends are a regular horde of locusts, so I stopped for a hamburger on the road."

Ed was edging away toward the side door, where he had left his car.

"Don't be in a hurry to run off," said Charles Overton.

"Sorry, sir," said Ed. "I've got to be in court early. Something has come up about that fake insurance ring

we've been investigating. Good night, sir. See you, JoJo."

Uncle Chuck looked at JoJo quizzically as Ed left. JoJo smiled at him mistily and shook her head. "No questions, darling." She turned and ran upstairs.

Chapter 13

IF SHE married Ed before the end of April, she'd be leaving the First Ward Hospital before Manuel was discharged. JoJo figured this out as she moved about the Children's Ward the next day, stopping to talk and laugh a little with each youngster as she straightened a pillow, picked up a toy that had fallen to the floor or helped a child handle his "dwink of water." Would Manuel revert to his former unmanageable little self? she wondered. He had behaved like a regular little charmer lately, even obeying the nurses' orders without tears or tantrums. But then, she had always been able to promise to see him again "the day after tomorrow." What would happen if he found she was not coming back to the ward regularly?

I'd better start preparing him, thought JoJo. After all, I have promised to marry Ed, and if he insists on an early date, I suppose it wouldn't be fair to refuse. But I wish I'd never set a date at all!

She looked so woebegone when she went over to Manuel's bed that he noticed it.

"You look as if you're goin' to cry," said Manuel. "You sick, JoJo?"

"No, I'm not sick, Manuel," said JoJo, managing a smile. "It just makes me feel bad to think that some day I'll have to leave the hospital."

"Why?" demanded the forthright Manuel.

"Because I'm going to be married and then I'll have to stay in my own house."

Late as it had been when she got to bed the night

before, she had been unable to fall asleep for a long time. She realized that Ed Talbot had meant what he had said. He would not be put off any longer. She knew, too, that she dared not suggest that she continue her work as a nurse's aide in the hospital, to say nothing of going on later with her studies.

Did she, she asked herself in the hour before dawn, love Ed Talbot? She had thought so for a long time now! But she could not remember falling in love. She and Ed had paired off, and after a while their crowd had taken it for granted that Ed and JoJo would be together at all their affairs. Then there had been that night beside the Lake when Ed had given her the sapphire ring—she was so mixed up!

Only one thing was clear. Marrying Ed Talbot meant giving up her nursing career. Her hopes of combining a career with marriage to Ed were unrealistic; Ed simply would not stand for it, and it would be silly to continue to insist on it.

It all came down to one question: Did she love Ed enough to accept his terms? Except for this area of disagreement, she and Ed had gotten along very well together, she admitted. Up to now, they had always enjoyed being together. They liked the same people, they had the same background, their families liked each other. Was she being ridiculous about this career of hers? The world wouldn't miss one practical nurse—a half trained one at that. There might be a scarcity of nurses, registered nurses, pediatric nurses, psychiatric aides, every kind of nurse, but what could she, all by herself, do to help the situation? Oh, she could contribute her small effort, of course, but when you came right down to it, did anybody except herself care? She'd give Ed her answer, and it would be yes. On that determination she fell asleep.

But she had cried herself to sleep.

So here she was in the Children's Ward, trying to break the news gently to Manuel. Soon she wouldn't be seeing him any more.

Manuel's eyes seemed to grow bigger and darker as he listened to her.

"Come on, Manuel; give me a big smile," she coaxed. "If you're well enough, you can come and dance at

my wedding. That's a promise." She leaned down and kissed the small boy on the top of his head. Instantly Manuel's one arm was around her neck, holding her tight.

"Don't leave me, JoJo," he whispered. "I'll grow up fast and then *I'll* marry you."

JoJo unclasped the thin little arm and stood up. "Why, that's sweet of you, Manuel," she murmured. "Let's wait till you grow up to talk about it, shall we? Be a good boy now and lie down for your nap." She turned at the door, waving back cheerily to Manuel, but as she backed out of the room, her eyes were full of tears. She swung around blindly and came up against a broad, white-coated chest.

"Steady on!" A pair of muscular arms went around her, then held her off as she regained her balance. She looked up into the amused dark eyes of Doctor Fielding. But the amusement vanished at the sight of her tears.

"Tears? What's wrong? Want to come along to my office and tell me about it?"

JoJo shook her head.

"Well, come along to my office anyway. I've something to tell you."

The doctor motioned her to an armchair near his desk.

"Relax," he said. "I want to tell you about Jim Norton. He hasn't been doing too well, and I'm having him brought here this afternoon. There's a private room ready for him so he can have his friends visit, and we'll have a look at that hip."

"The poor old fellow." JoJo forgot her own troubles for a moment. "I feel responsible for him in a way. I'll drop by and try to cheer him up."

"Good!" said Doctor Greg. "Now suppose you tell me why you were crying a while ago."

"It was Manuel. He wants me to wait till he grows up so he can marry me." JoJo's voice broke and she swallowed hard.

"Why not? What's fifteen years or so in the life of a debutante? That's nothing to cry about, I should think.

A bona fide offer of marriage." He tried to win a smile from JoJo and received a watery one.

"But I won't be seeing him much longer. Ed wants our wedding to be soon—by the end of April. He'll never let me go on being a nurse's aide."

The doctor eyed her keenly. "You're not in love with Ed, then?"

"I didn't say that."

"Actions speak louder than words," said the doctor.

"I like him a lot. We get along beautifully except for this one subject—my trying to be a good nurse."

"He doesn't approve?"

"It makes him furious."

"Give him a little time and perhaps he'll see it your way when he realizes you're in earnest."

"But there's no time," wailed JoJo. "We had set the wedding date for June, and I was going to try to talk him into letting me continue. Now he won't wait; he won't even listen." She lifted drenched eyes to Doctor Fielding. "I'm not even sure he really loves me. Sometimes I think he just wants to dominate me. I guess I'm not very lovable anyway." She stood up to go.

Doctor Fielding was on his feet, too. He took a step toward her and caught her in his arms. "I love you," he murmured huskily, as if he could not keep the words back.

As suddenly as he had put his arms around her, he dropped them.

"Forget I said that," he stammered. "It was just the way you said you were not lovable . . ." He walked across the room and stood with his back to her, looking out the window.

"You'd better go," he said in a muffled voice.

JoJo waited a moment, then slipped out of the door, hearing it close softly behind her on its cushioned hinges as she went along the corridor.

JoJo left the hospital and went for a long drive beside the Lake. She stopped the car and sat watching the late afternoon sun dancing on the water. Doctor Fielding's words had stirred in her the realization that she could love him. But, she told herself, she had thought she loved Ed. Perhaps she really loved them both. Was

it possible to be in love with two men at the same time?

It was Ed who was asking her to marry him, she reminded herself. And she had promised to marry him. She held her engagement ring so that the star in its sapphire depths twinkled at her. She must come to some conclusion, JoJo told herself. Should she call Ed, say that their engagement had been a mistake and give him back the ring? Suppose he asked her if another man—say Gregory Fielding—had asked her to marry him? Well, the answer to that was no. There was a vast difference between a man saying he loved you and asking you to marry him, she told herself.

But suppose she was making a mistake? Suppose she really wanted to marry Ed Talbot? She had thought she did . . . it seemed as if she had always expected to marry him.

The more she thought about it the more confused JoJo became. She started the car and drove aimlessly through the countryside, noticed at last that the sun was going down and turned toward home. Maybe Ed had telephoned and wanted to apologize for his words at their last meeting. Maybe if she saw him again and they talked things over sensibly . . .

But Ed had not telephoned, Matilda said when Josette got home. Mr. Overton had gone out to dinner; did JoJo want hers now?

JoJo had skipped lunch, but she was not very hungry. She asked Matilda to bring her soup and a sandwich on a tray and went to sit in Uncle Chuck's den. It was there that she and Doctor Fielding had found so much to discuss.

Suddenly she remembered that she had said she would drop in on poor Jim Norton. He must be pretty lonesome on his first day in a private room in the hospital, and with his hip paining him, too. She finished her sandwich, told Matilda she was going out for an hour or so and left.

Jim Norton was delighted to see her.

"Come in, come in," he cackled. "Come in and stay for the visiting hour—till the all-out bell rings."

They were deep in talk when the door opened very slowly. A small wiry man stood there, his nondescript suit and well-worn hat, JoJo thought, as effective as a

disguise. His pointed face, something like a ferret's, was creased by a smile, but it turned out to be more of a leer. His right arm was held in a sling, but the tip of a cast showed at the front.

"Googie!" Jim Norton exclaimed, leaning against his back rest with a sigh of relief. "You've been in an accident, too, huh?"

"Just broke an arm," Googie said as if this were an everyday occurrence. He refused the bedside chair JoJo indicated, and his sharp, bright eyes darted around the room, taking in every detail. "Yessir, this is pretty fancy: picture window, roses on the bureau and fancy curtains."

"This here is Miss Josette DeCourcy," Norton said, suddenly thinking of his duties as a host. "She's treated me like a king, she has, ever since the night of the accident."

"I'm glad to know you," Josette said with as much cordiality as she could muster. She picked up a magazine lying on the table and sat down in a corner chair, making herself as inconspicuous as possible.

"The Boss told me to look for you in all the joints where you usually hang out," Googie continued conversationally, "to see how you were getting on."

"I thank him for his interest," Jim Norton said formally.

"Naturally he has an interest," said Googie sharply. "He pays for your policy, doesn't he?"

JoJo still held the magazine before her, like a shield, but she could not focus on the printed page.

"But then," Googie complained, "you wasn't anywhere around. So I runs into Smitty—you know, the guy who keeps the newsstand—and he tells me you're back in the hospital. I don't have time to contact the Boss, and he tells me to see you today, so I come over to the hospital expectin' to find you in one of the twenty-bed wards. You're all set up in what must be the bridal soot."

Jim Norton cackled his appreciation of this pleasantry. "Sit down, Googie," he invited. "Tell me how'd you break your arm? Fall out of bed?" He cackled again.

JoJo glanced at her wristwatch; in a little while

visiting hours would be over and the regular nurse would come bustling in with starched efficiency.

"Maybe the little lady would leave us alone for a minute," Googie said in an oily voice. "What I got to say is kind of private."

JoJo put down the magazine and moved over to the bedside. "Doctor's orders," she said cheerfully. "This patient is not to be left alone at any time. When I am on duty I relieve the day nurse for an hour, and an orderly relieves the night nurse."

"Cut the chatter, sister," Googie said harshly. "Get out and get out fast."

"You can't talk like that to Miss DeCourcy," Jim Norton protested. "You know she's a society dame. DeCourcy—the real dough."

"Then what's she doing in the First Ward Hospital?" the visitor demanded truculently.

"I must ask you to leave. You are disturbing the patient." JoJo stiffened as she watched an incredible phenomenon.

Googie withdrew his arm from the sling and tugged lightly at the whole front of the cast, which fell away. In his hand he held a small, wicked-looking pistol equipped with a strange gadget that JoJo guessed was a silencer.

"Your arm ain't broke at all!" Jim Norton said in sort of a moan. He started to shiver so violently that JoJo reached out and threw her arm about the thin shoulders. With her other hand, below the pillows, she managed to reach the button that pressed a red light in the corridor above the door.

"Get out of the way, sister, or I'll plug you both," Googie whispered menacingly.

"Go ahead and do that," JoJo said, tightening her grip on Norton's shoulder. "Kill both of us and you'll walk right into the arms of the police. There's a warning light flashing on and off in the hall this minute."

"Trouble, miss?"

JoJo was glad to see that the orderly answering the call was a six-foot-two young man. She knew he was supporting himself through college and, if she remembered rightly, he was one of the stars of the wrestling team.

"Yes, Bobby," she said with relief. "Mr. Norton has had a sudden chill and I'd like you to help me make him more comfortable until we can get the doctor to okay a sedative."

She glanced at Googie, whose "broken" arm was miraculously back in its sling. "You'll have to run along now," she said coldly.

With a muttered oath that made Bobby look at him curiously, Googie flung out the door.

JoJo stopped by Doctor Fielding's office, intent upon telling him her frightening experience with the gangster. But he was in Operating and had an emergency traffic accident on his hands. She glanced at the clock; it was already seven-thirty. She took out her car keys as she went out onto the street and walked toward her car, absently pondering the problem. How could gangsters be so stupid as to think they could get away with murder in a big, heavily staffed hospital?

Then suddenly she realized that the plan had been very simple. Of course! In a twenty-bed ward during visiting hours the beds were surrounded; the chairs were few; there was talk and confused laughter and surreptitious presents of food. There were also beds for those who had just been operated on or for those who were allowed no visitors. But these were screened off, and the two orderlies at either end of the ward were so busy they could not watch for possible accidents. Googie, apparently hurt himself, would have chatted with his friend for a while and then leaned over as if giving him a quick "nip." After that, when the shot had been fired, he would have said a few words of goodbye and faded into the dusk. No one afterwards would remember who Jim Norton's visitor had been.

JoJo slid behind the driver's wheel, turned on the ignition and reached over to slam the door of her small, compact car. As she tugged at the door, suddenly Googie's face leered down at her.

"Okay, Babe," he said to a shadowy figure behind him. "Get in back and drag her over."

JoJo opened her mouth to scream, and Googie slapped her hard across the face. Before she could speak a wide band of adhesive tape was expertly

smoothed over her lips from behind, a heavy blindfold was bound tightly around her eyes, and her hands were tied together with a cord that cut into the flesh. She was lifted as effortlessly as a handful of feathers over onto the back seat, and there was the hum of a motor as Googie started the engine and the car purred softly away from the curb.

Chapter 14

IT SEEMED like a long time that they rode over rough roads before the car came to a complete standstill. JoJo was lifted out of the car and the bandage removed from her eyes. They were standing before a dark, sinister-looking house with only one room apparently lighted. Googie led her into the lighted room, which seemed to be a long and sparsely furnished kitchen. She moaned as the adhesive tape was ripped from her mouth and the cord that bound her wrists was untied. She opened her bruised lips experimentally.

"Scream if you want to," said a voice behind her. "Nobody can hear you except Googie there and Babe."

Whirling around, JoJo saw a long, lanky figure wrapped in a heavy bathrobe and wearing a plaid woolen muffler and a stocking cap. She noticed his shoes, expensive-looking brown oxfords, incongruous with the rest of his costume. As she stared at him the man bent over, racked by an explosive cough.

"Gotta cold," the man explained after the spasm had passed.

"Well, cover your mouth when you cough, then," said JoJo tartly, and in her own ears her voice sounded exactly like Aunt Liza's reproving a settlement house youngster for some infraction of the rules.

"Shaddup," said Babe, glaring down at JoJo. He was well over six feet; he bulged with fat, and his face was round and expressionless.

"That's no way to talk to a lady, Babe," said the man with a cold. "If you talk rough she'll start cryin',

most likely. And you know I can't stand seein' a woman cry."

JoJo, bewildered, stared from one to the other. "What do you want with me?" she demanded. "Are you muggers?"

"Muggers!" repeated the man with the cold. "Certainly not!" He seemed offended at the very suggestion. "Cheap amatoors, that's all they are. *We're* professionals." He straightened his thin shoulders proudly, thereby bringing on another coughing spell.

Ignoring JoJo, when he was able to speak again he turned to the other two, who had been watching him uneasily. "What's this all about?" he asked them fretfully. "Who told you to make a snatch?"

The wiry little Googie walked close to the other man and spoke in a tone so low, using such strange words, JoJo could not catch what he was saying. But the name DeCourcy and every so often the words, "the old guy," were clear enough. Also, something was said about "loaded with money."

JoJo pointed to an empty chair beside the kitchen table. "Mind if I sit down?" she inquired. "It's tiring to stand around like this, even if I won't be here long."

"Y' hear that, Rick?" spluttered Babe, rocking back and forth on his heels with loud laughter.

The man with the cold grinned thinly. "Listen, sister, nobody blows the whistle on me," he assured JoJo. This time he went into a coughing fit that left him lying back in a chair, his face glistening with perspiration.

"He's a sick man," JoJo said, turning from Googie to Babe. "Have you called the doctor?"

"You're crazy," muttered Googie. "That's a good one, that is. 'Call a doctor.' You think we're stoopid or somethin'?"

Rick spoke up bitterly. "Sure—it would suit you guys fine if I croaked, wouldn't it? You two have been listenin' to me cough for the last two weeks and you don't even say it's too bad I gotta cold. Say," he said, turning to JoJo, "you was snatched from a hospital, so it figures you can take care of a sick guy, huh? You're a nurse, ain't you?"

"A nurse in diamonds and mink, maybe," Babe

snickered. "She's the DeCourcy gal, all right. Norton said so."

"Oh, stop standing around talking," JoJo commanded. "I'm a practical nurse, and I assure you this man should be given help at once."

"Here, wait a minute!" JoJo had picked up her purse from the kitchen table and started to open it. Before she could loosen the clasp, Googie said sharply:

"Hold it, Lady. We wouldn't want anyone to get hurt."

JoJo looked up in surprise. Googie's little gun was pointed directly at her midriff.

"I've got aspirin and some tissues in my purse." Before she could finish Babe took the purse out of her hands and emptied it with one swift gesture onto the table. The lipstick rolled off onto the floor, and Babe picked it up. Googie had the grace to look sheepish and put the gun away.

"She don't carry a gun, Boss. But I don't like to take chances."

"You're taking a big chance with me right now," the man said, clutching his bathrobe around him. "Get me a glass of water before I clobber you one. Okay, miss—make with the aspirins." JoJo gave him the tissues as well, and he looked at her apologetically.

"Babe and Googie ain't got no refinement," he explained. "Me, I know all about you society dames; you never carry a gun. My kid brother Eddie is running around with a blonde dame right now."

"Eddie's got refinement; he's even got a title," Googie put in.

"The title's okay," Rick said defensively. "We got a castle to prove it. Me, I didn't want to use it so I gave it to Eddie."

JoJo looked at the man in the bathrobe with dawning recognition. The features were coarser than those of Flip Talbot's latest escort, but there was a distinct family resemblance. "Eddie is Count Eduardo!"

"Yeah. My kid brother's got real class. I sent him to the best schools, see? And he's got the looks, too. Any dame would be mighty lucky to latch onto him. But what I told him—get class and the dough, while you're at it."

JoJo saw, and the thought of Flip Talbot almost getting mixed with a mobster—even one with class—made her a little sick. "Then you are Emil Ricciardo," she said flatly.

"Sure, that's him," Babe said, pawing through the contents of JoJo's purse. "Smartest guy in the rackets. Nobody can pin anything on the Boss," he said proudly.

"Where is the pantry?" JoJo demanded as Ricciardo bent double again.

"The pantry?" Googie stared at her. But at an imperious gesture from the racketeer, he led JoJo into a sort of alcove and switched on the light. It was an adequate pantry, with wide shelves on two sides, but woefully in need of cleaning up. The shelves were almost bare, but JoJo saw at a glance that the two items she wanted were there: a half-filled bottle of pancake syrup and a can of tomato juice.

Googie said defensively: "We don't often stay here, only when we want to use it as a hide—I mean to get away from the city."

They went back into the kitchen, and Babe opened the tomato juice and watched JoJo mix it with the pancake syrup. She gave the mixture a quick stir and then handed it to Ricciardo, who took the glass with great reluctance.

"Don't drink this in one gulp," JoJo admonished him. "Just sip it slowly—a little at a time. And don't talk for a while. I'll do the talking, and Babe or Googie can answer me. After a while, when your throat gets eased a little by the syrup, you can join in the conversation."

Ricciardo took a delicate sip of the mixture, made a face and then nodded to JoJo to go ahead. She took a deep breath; she had been thinking hard and suddenly remembered where she had seen the name Emil Ricciardo. It dawned on her all at once that this was the beneficiary named in Jim Norton's insurance policy. JoJo was not worried about her own safety; she was worth more alive than dead to the racketeer. But she did not want Uncle Chuck to be worried a moment longer than necessary. Ricciardo choked on his tomato juice and syrup, but under JoJo's stern glance he swallowed it manfully.

She turned to Babe and said: "Turn on the radio, if you've got one. It's about time for the news."

Babe appeared puzzled by her belligerent manner, but at a gesture from Ricciardo, he tuned in a local station. The newscaster was discussing the international situation at some length, and JoJo wondered if she had lost this part of her gamble. Then suddenly it came:

"Police have been alerted to watch the roads for Josette DeCourcy, heiress to the DeCourcy fortune. Her guardian, Charles H. Overton, has expressed fears that the popular young debutante may have been involved in an accident. Her fiancé, Edward Stanley Talbot, revealed that he had long objected to her working as nurse's aide at the First Ward Hospital in the warehouse district. However, he admitted the possibility that his fiancée might have made a date she forgot to mention."

Babe switched off the radio, and Googie broke the silence with a terse comment:

"If that Talbot guy is the one you're going to marry, I'm sorry for you, kid. He's a jerk if I ever heard one. I suppose he was the one driving the night Jim got push—"

"Did you push Jim Norton?" JoJo looked at him distastefully. "But it doesn't really matter at the moment; I'm more concerned with myself now. I suppose Mister Ricciardo here is planning on holding me for ransom. How much are you thinking of?"

"Twenty grand shouldn't be too much for a dame like you," Googie said earnestly.

"And how do you propose to get the money?"

"Aw, we'll just take a check and scram. I'm sure your guardian won't try to hold it up if your life is at stake. We'll phone and make a deal."

JoJo glanced inquiringly at Ricciardo, who nodded, as if pleased with the plan.

"You're all very smart," she commented sarcastically. "Only there's one little thing you didn't know. Any check on the trust fund must be signed not only by me and by my guardian, Charles Overton, but also countersigned by a trustee of the bank. It would take time to get that check cashed. Meanwhile you could be well started on your way to the electric chair."

"You mean to say you got all that dough and can't get at it?" Babe demanded. "What kind of a setup is that?"

"Yeah, what about it?" Googie chimed in. "Are you crazy or somethin' so that you can't have your own money?"

"The trust fund doesn't become legally mine until I'm twenty-five," JoJo explained sweetly.

"You're such bright boys," Ricciardo told his henchmen bitterly. "Other people plan a snatch down to the last detail, but you just grab."

"Your throat sounds better already," JoJo commented, and was rewarded with a scathing look.

"Don't get uppity," the racketeer commanded. "So it will take time; you'll stay right here till we get the dough. And believe you me, you'll sign that check and be glad to do it."

"You tell her, Boss," Babe applauded.

"Mister Ricciardo, you own this house, don't you?" JoJo inquired.

"Sure. Hold it through a dummy corporation. Why?"

"Because," JoJo said, forcing herself to keep her voice steady, "your name is on Jim Norton's life insurance policy. I don't have it," she added hastily as Googie made a gesture as if to reach for his gun. "It is being held by Doctor Gregory Fielding of the First Ward Hospital. He suspected you'd make another attempt to kill the old man; that's why he put him back in the hospital."

"So what?" Googie sneered. "We can take care of him, too."

"There isn't enough time," JoJo said calmly. "If I am gone just a little longer, Doctor Fielding will go to the police. You have been under investigation for quite a while," she added, hoping it was true. "Whether or not you set up a dummy corporation, the police surely have a list of everything you own. I doubt if you can wait here more than an hour; you're sitting ducks!"

Ricciardo let loose a stream of profanity JoJo was glad she could not understand, even though it was directed at Babe and Googie instead of herself. Finally she stopped him.

"If you will listen to me a minute," JoJo inter-

rupted, "I have an idea that might help. I have a checking account; there's a little over eight hundred dollars in it. I will write you a check for that amount if you promise to let me out of this place right away."

"So you'll stop payment on the check," Ricciardo said suspiciously.

"No, I won't do that, providing you get out of town. In fact, if you go to Chicago, I'll phone my aunt, who lives there, to cash the check for you. Eight hundred is not twenty thousand, but it's better than nothing and jail besides."

"Hey," Googie interrupted, "Babe and me are in on this, too. You want to know where we're going so that you can tip off the police."

"Yeah—how about that?" Babe put in.

"I won't mention these few hours to the police, I give you my word," JoJo said impatiently. "I can always say I drove one of the First Ward patients home and got lost on the way back. You can listen in while I make the phone call to my aunt. I'll say the check is in payment for a piece of jewelry. She won't question it."

"And what's in it for you?" questioned Ricciardo.

"Poor old Jim Norton's life," JoJo retorted. "I want you to promise me that you'll get out of town and that, if you ever do come back, you won't harm him."

"And the insurance policy?" the racketeer asked.

"I'll get it back from Doctor Fielding and destroy it personally," JoJo promised. "You'll just have to take my word for that—as I'll take your word about leaving town."

"Suppose the cops stop us?" Googie demanded.

"I'll be following you. The car they stop will be mine; they'll be looking for it," JoJo pointed out. "You just keep going. There is no reason for the police to stop you—yet." She could sense the three were still unconvinced, so she played her last card.

"Don't let me persuade you to do anything you don't want to do," JoJo said sharply. "But as I pointed out before, you really don't have much choice. Keep me here and get caught and get, at the least, prison for life. You especially, Ricciardo, have a lot to lose. It won't do Count Eduardo any good to have all the 'refine-

ments' you paid for if you are permanently locked up."

The racketeer stiffened, and then all at once he wilted.

"I thought you society dames were soft," he said in a wondering voice. "Whoever told me so was nuts. You got more guts than any guy I know. Get out your checkbook, Lady. Don't you say anything," he warned Babe and Googie. "Remember, the snatch was your idea. I'm just trying to make the best of a bum layout."

Googie whined something about doing his best as JoJo undid the zipper compartment in her pocketbook, took out her checkbook and wrote out a check for eight hundred dollars. She handed it to Ricciardo with a flourish. He looked at it carefully, folded it and put it in his bathrobe pocket.

"Okay. I'm going to get dressed now, and we'll get going in a few minutes. Everything better work out right, Sister, or there sure will be the devil to pay."

JoJo looked after him as he left the room and for the first time was afraid. She began to tremble, but she reminded herself she could not afford to break down now. There was still danger ahead.

Chapter 15

JoJo BROUGHT her car to a stop in front of the First Ward Hospital. Before she went inside she leaned across the steering wheel and tried to pull herself together. There was just one more thing to do. When that was over she could be assured that Jim Norton's life was safe and that she herself would be free to go home and collapse for twenty-four hours or maybe a week.

For the past hour, JoJo had behaved like an automaton. Emil Ricciardo had gotten dressed and, with Babe and Googie, got into one car while JoJo got in her own. The back roads were utterly unfamiliar to her and, as she pointed out to the racketeers, she wasn't even tempted to swerve from the tail lights of the car ahead. They had proceeded in this fashion until they passed a gas station, now dark, but with an all-night telephone booth in front of it.

There Ricciardo had halted and, flanked by Babe and the trigger-happy Googie, had stood outside while she phoned Aunt Liza in Chicago. While the call was going through JoJo prayed that her aunt would be at home and not at the settlement house. Luck was with her. In fact, Aunt Liza did not seem to be at all amazed at the phone call.

"Darling! How nice to hear from you!" Liza's voice seemed so close that she might almost have been on that lonely country road. "I've missed you so. How are things going? Busy, I suppose, in that great big hospital. When are you coming out here again? How

is Charles? Is he there with you? Could I speak to him a minute?"

Out of the corner of her eye JoJo could see that Ricciardo and Googie were looking distrustfully into the lighted telephone booth. However, she had to answer her aunt's questions first, and then she came straight to the point. She could feel as well as see the tension relaxing in the three gangsters as they heard her smooth explanation. In fact, JoJo was rather interested herself at the way the lies rolled smoothly from her lips.

"Aunt Liza, I don't have too much time. I just found the most fabulous piece of jewelry that came out of a medieval castle in Italy. I got it for only eight hundred dollars. But my problem is this: the man I am buying it from is leaving for Chicago tonight. I have given him a check, but he doesn't know anyone in Chicago, and I thought he might have trouble getting it cashed. He should be there early Monday morning."

"But of course, Josette." Aunt Liza's voice sounded happily pleased that she was party to the transaction. "Send your friend along to me, and I will deposit your check and take him to my bank to cash one of my own. What type of jewelry is it."

"It's a bracelet," JoJo stammered, not having anticipated the question. "I do really have to run now, darling. But thanks a million for helping me out of this fix."

JoJo had to hang onto the telephone for a second after she hung up. She was drenched with perspiration and felt as if her knees would not hold her up. But apparently the conversation had been satisfactory to Ricciardo and his two helpers. They got back into the car and led the way on to still unfamiliar roads.

Before she left the telephone booth, JoJo inquired timidly if she could phone her guardian and assure him she was safe. But this they would not hear of; they were apparently as nervous and anxious to get out of the neighborhood as she was. JoJo had no choice but to continue following their tail light.

Then all at once the curving road made an abrupt turn and they were on the highway. At the same moment she knew exactly where they were and was sur-

prised that it had not been too far from home. Once on the broad pavement, the racketeers' car picked up speed, and JoJo kept pace with it. They were approaching an intersection when she saw a police car coming toward them from the other direction. As she had suggested, Ricciardo's car kept on smoothly enough, and as the police car signaled her to a halt she watched the vanishing tail lights and devoutly hoped that she had seen them for the last time.

"Pardon me, miss; are you Josette DeCourcy?" the state trooper asked as he looked into the car.

JoJo admitted she was and then expressed surprise that she had been missed. She had taken a patient home from the First Ward Hospital, JoJo explained, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She had gotten lost on the back roads but eventually had discovered one that led to the highway. She was worried because of her guardian and would telephone him as soon as she could. Meanwhile, if they would be so kind, would they notify the radio station and have them broadcast the fact that she was safe and well?

At an all-night diner a few miles farther on, JoJo found a phone booth and called her home. At the sound of Uncle Chuck's voice, she realized how deeply worried he had been. But he, like the troopers, accepted her statement that she had been lost in an unfamiliar part of the county and that it had taken some time to get her bearings.

"I wish I could come right home, Uncle Chuck," JoJo said before she hung up. "But you must realize that I have to go back to the First Ward Hospital and check out the case. When I do get home I promise you I'm going to stay there for quite a while. I had no idea I could get so thoroughly lost and bewildered."

"You just come along when you can," Charles Overton boomed genially. "I was sorry to report to the police that you were missing, but for a while there I was definitely alarmed. As long as you are safe and well, I won't hold a stop-watch on you."

That had been the story of the last hour. JoJo knew she could now take the final step.

The First Ward Hospital had most of its lights dimmed in its nocturnal wait for the morning. But

there was one brightly lit office which was, JoJo knew, that of Doctor Gregory Fielding. She had only to get through the next fifteen or twenty minutes, and then she could collapse if she wanted to. With a murmured greeting to the nurse on duty, JoJo went up to Gregory's office and entered without knocking.

Doctor Gregory Fielding, immaculate in the starched white jacket which signified he was on call, looked up as she entered but did not rise. In fact, he looked actually angry with the whole world, and with JoJo in particular. She went over and leaned on his desk while she said in a breathless voice:

"A while back, I gave you a life insurance policy for Jim Norton. May I have it back, please?"

Still without speaking, in a few seconds Doctor Fielding handed her the legal document. JoJo glanced at it just to make sure it was the insurance policy; then, with great deliberation, she tore it slowly and methodically into small pieces. Only then did Gregory Fielding speak.

"So you promised that you would destroy the policy, too," he said coolly. "I hope you made a good bargain."

"I—I—" JoJo started to protest, but she could not finish the sentence.

"Yes, I know," Gregory Fielding said impatiently. "You took home one of the First Ward patients and got lost on your way back. That information just came over the radio. However, may I point out that we never release a patient except in the custody of his family or someone else who is responsible for him? Also, may I point out that even if we had let you take a patient home, he or she could not have lived so far away? The jurisdiction of Clarkesville is limited, and no patient we take in lives more than twenty-five miles from this immediate vicinity."

"So I lied," JoJo retorted, with a last burst of energy. "But I did it in a good cause. Jim Norton is now safe to live out his remaining days."

"You took the word of Emil Ricciardo for that?" the doctor said incredulously. "How foolish can you be?"

JoJo found herself beginning to tremble, but she resolutely held on to the edge of the desk.

"I promised that I would not talk about these last few hours," she said in a voice that quavered in spite of herself. "In return I exacted a promise. That's all I'm going to say."

All at once Gregory came around the desk and drew her into a nearby chair. "I'll get you a sedative," he said in a soothing tone. "And then I'll wipe away the traces of adhesive tape they had pasted across your mouth. Your mouth may be a bit swollen for the next few days, but I guess they didn't hurt you otherwise."

"How did you guess?" Josette said weakly. She had begun to tremble so violently that it was hard even to sit in the chair.

"It wasn't so difficult," Gregory said, smiling for the first time. "When I got out of the operating room I heard that Jim Norton had had a visitor and that you had summoned an orderly to help you change his bed. Then all at once you disappeared, and from what Norton said, I gather that you ran into Ricciardo's mob. I was going to give you another fifteen minutes to get here when I heard that ridiculous broadcast about you getting lost. The next broadcast I heard was also pretty revealing. Emil Ricciardo and two men who were with him hit the guard rail a few miles farther along the highway where you were stopped. The car went over the cliff, and all three are very thoroughly dead."

Without meaning to, JoJo found herself sobbing so that she could scarcely speak.

"They weren't bad men," she finally managed. "At least they were decent to me."

Gregory Fielding bent over her chair and looked down into her face intently as she raised her tear-drenched eyes. "You little nitwit," he scolded her gently. "What do you mean by bargaining your life away for the sake of old Jim Norton? These men were professional mobsters. It wouldn't have been the first time they killed somebody. I never before heard of them letting anyone go once they got him or her in their clutches. You took a terrible chance."

"Ricciardo had a very bad cough," JoJo protested meekly, "and I told him what to take for it. Being a practical nurse has certain advantages. He seemed sort of grateful."

For answer Gregory Fielding lifted her from her chair and kissed her—a long, long kiss. JoJo let herself melt into his arms, feeling as if she had been on a far journey but was now safely home at last. As abruptly as he had seized her, Gregory let her go and retired once again behind his desk.

"I shouldn't have done that. You are going to marry Ed Talbot," he said, biting off the words, "and live a glamorous life in diplomatic society abroad. He has everything to offer you—a coveted place in the world to which you were born, wealth, even good looks."

"What are you trying to say, Gregory? That if it weren't for Ed, you . . ." She broke off demurely.

"I am trying to say," Doctor Fielding continued in the same biting voice, "that in any case you wouldn't want to marry a small town doctor faced with nothing but a lifetime of hard work."

"For your information, Doctor Fielding"— JoJo slipped Ed Talbot's ring off her finger— "I am giving Ed back his ring. I now know I was never in love with him. I didn't know what love meant. It was just that everybody seemed to expect us to get engaged and, of course, we were invited everywhere together. . . ." Her voice trailed off. "As for hard work," she suddenly demanded, "what's the matter with that, especially if it's the kind of work that means helping other people to live?"

Before she could anticipate his quick movement Gregory had rounded the desk and taken her into his arms.

"No more talk," he said. "You've had a rough time during the last few hours. I'll take you home—you need a good rest—but only after you tell me you're going to marry me."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you'll have to stay right here in my arms until you do."

"I thought you'd never ask me," JoJo murmured against his white coat. "I'll marry you, Gregory, but . . ."

"But what?"

"You won't take me home right away, will you?"

"Well, not exactly." Gregory bent and kissed her

until she was breathless. "As soon as convenient, though." He drew her close to him again and this time kissed her softly.

"To be continued," he murmured, as he turned her toward the door. She stood stockstill as he threw his white coat on a chair and lifted his street coat from the rack. Josette held back as he headed toward the door. "I'm taking you home now if I have to carry you," he said with mock sternness. "Let's go. That's an order, Nurse. Doctor's orders."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS!

Give up her fun-filled life as the most prominent debutante in town.

Devote herself to helping the poor and the sick.

Return Ed Talbot's ring and forget her glamorous future as his wife.

It was strong medicine. But Josette knew she must do it if she wanted Doctor Gregory Fielding's respect.

Yet, why was his approval so important to her?

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